

A
System of Divinity,

I N

A COURSE of SERMONS

O N T H E

Being, Nature, and Attributes of God;

On some of the most important ARTICLES of

The Christian Religion, in Connection;

A N D

On the several VIRTUES and VICES of MANKIND.

In SIX VOLUMES.

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MORETON HAMPSTEAD, DEVON.

V O L. IV.

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SERMON XXXIX.

Of Infidelity; its Folly, Sinfulness, and Danger.

HEB. iii. 12. “*Take heed, Brethren, lest there be
“in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief.”*”

AS we live in an age so profane and sceptical, as to call in question the most universally received principles both of reason and religion; in an age, wherein the being and perfections of God, the Creator, are even disputed, by creatures of an inferior order, and the works of his own hands; and wickedness and irreligion do thereby so greatly abound, it may not be unfit, before all things, to set forth, in a plain manner, the Folly, Sinfulness, and Danger of Infidelity, how naturally prone it is to wickedness, which is the supplanter of all “peace, quietness, rest, and assurance for ever.”

After the first formation of all things, it pleased the Almighty Governor of the world, for the better conduct of his creatures, to have a standing record

made of all things, in order to preserve a right idea and notion of our origin, of His being and perfections, and of our duty consequent thereon, in order that, in the end, upon our proper behaviour here before him, we may hereafter be for ever happy with him. And,

That nothing might be wanting for our fullest conviction, He hath “through ages and gene-
“rations confirmed it by wonders and signs fol-
“lowing.”

Nothing therefore can be more evident, even in the common course of things, than that Infidelity must thwart this wise and benign intention of our Maker, for his glory, and our good; and that it is not only our duty, but prudent also, and our interest, so to examine things that we may answer the ends for which our beings were given us.

This is the intent and design of the Apostle in the words before us: To further and promote which, I shall,

First, Shew the cause of Infidelity: And then,
Secondly, The folly, sin, and fatal tendency thereof.

First, Of Infidelity, the nature and cause thereof. Vice is generally supposed to be the ground of it, equally as that is the foundation of all wickedness.

The reason of mens' opposition to the truth, and rejection of it, why they “love darkness rather than light,” is, “because their deeds are evil.”

Men

Men may pretend to other reasons for their Infidelity and opposition to the truth, and may argue against the principles of religion with a seemingly honest heart in good earnest, and against the reasonableness and truth of Christianity from an apparent real contrary persuasion. But,

No man that hath these things fairly proposed to him, with all the advantages they are capable of, and who with due attention considers them, but must acknowledge their justice and equity; that they are not only reasonable, but divine, and worthy of God; and therefore most “worthy of all men to be received;” consequently, men can no more reasonably object against them, than they can find any thing worthy to be compared with them.

If any man reject the truths of Christianity, it is not because he hath good and sufficient reasons against them, but because he is swayed by some contrary prejudice or evil passion, which holds him in fetters to a different principle. “No man can serve two masters:” Infidelity and piety lead different ways; we cannot therefore “hold to the one, and still cleave to the other;” men cannot entertain the truth, and retain their lusts.

If men are resolved to continue in their sins, they are then indeed so far in the right to persist in and deny the force of all arguments against them;

for, an acknowledgment of these, would be a condemning of themselves.

It is natural for every man to defend himself, and to justify his doings as well as he can ; therefore, as he cannot reconcile his practice with the true principles of religion, he endeavours all in his power to oppose them, and to frame in their stead such principles as shall agree with his vicious inclination. These men are Infidels in their own defence, and merely to quiet their own minds. For,

A right belief and an evil practice are but unsuitable companions, perpetually chiding and upbraiding each other.

He who believes the principles of religion, and yet is conscious to himself that he hath lived contrary to them, and still continues to do so, how can he possibly have peace in his mind, unless, like Jonah, he can sleep in a storm ?

If his conscience be awake, and in any degree sensible, the evident danger of eternal ruin, continually suspended over him, must, in reason, either force him to repentance, or drive him to despair.

If so forcible an argument can make no impression upon us, we are then lost to every serious consideration. Thus,

As Wickedness prevails, so Infidelity abounds.

This was the true reason why the Jews rejected the Gospel of Christ, because they were vicious in their lives, and were unwilling to forego the pleasures

pleasures of sin. This is still the reason of mens' enmity and opposition to the truth. It declares against their evil deeds, and they are unwilling to leave them; so that having no other way to justify themselves and their actions, they condemn and reject that which reproves them.

This therefore is the foundation of all Infidelity, "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." But,

Besides this interest of evil men to oppose the truth, I might mention also their incapacity to discern it.

Our Saviour hath expressly said, that "if any man will do his word, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

We may therefore (by parity reverse) justly infer, that if we do it not, we are at a very remote distance from any true knowledge of it. As honesty is the best preservative, and sure guide to truth, so wickedness, and unholy living blind the senses from all right understanding.* This also might here be enlarged on, but I proceed,

Secondly, To shew, the sin and danger of it.

Could our Infidelity alter the nature, and destroy the reality of things, the wicked might then well be allowed wise in their conduct. But,

* See the last Sermon, Vol. VI. on Trinity-Sunday.

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As the eternal purposes of God cannot be altered according to the whim and caprice of men, it is the utmost folly imaginable to trifle with temptation, and to act against the clearest conviction.

Could we suppose that religion was false ; yet, so long as men please themselves in the course of it, and so many present advantages flow to society from the due observance of it, that surely, happy are all the true practisers thereof. But,

If true, as we have all imaginable convictions to assure us of it, both from the concurrent completion of prophecy, and testimony of miracles ; from the force of our uncorrupted conscience, and the consent of nations, together with the genuine purity of our religion, then, who does not see the folly of Infidelity, and the great danger thereof ?

Besides, How unsatisfactory is it ?

Religion is reasonable ; and, as such, reasonably accounts for all things ; whereas Atheism (i. e. Infidelity) wants a permanent foundation, and centers no where, but in the denial of God, and all that is good ; it substitutes no rational scheme of any thing, but leaves us in perpetual uncertainty ; yea, and “ levels us with the beasts that perish.”

It is plain, that such is the condition of human nature in this life, as to be insufficient for itself.

We are continually surrounded with evils, which we cannot prevent ; with wants, which we cannot supply :

supply; with infirmities, which we cannot remove; and dangers, which we can in no way escape.

Our enjoyments are such as are not for one moment secure; our expectations such as are not in our power to accomplish: We are apt to grieve for things we cannot help, and to be tormented with fears of what we cannot prevent; and “wretched indeed must the days of our pilgrimage have been,” were there not a God at the helm of affairs to guide and conduct them, and to be our strength and support in time of need.

In all these cases, there is no substantial comfort but in the belief of a God, and in the singular satisfaction of having Him for our friend.

How disconsolate and contradictory then must Atheism be?—for, on the one hand, he who believes there is a God, and lives suitable to such a persuasion, hath an interest in all his perfections; hath “every thing requisite to life and godliness;” “and is provided for, in every respect, both in this life and the next; whilst on the contrary the Atheist is left to himself in the midst of ten thousand accidents, with none better than himself to help him! And,

How frail is man! In the midst of distresses where can he fly—to God? no, for he believes Him not.

The former (i. e. he who believes a God) if he be in want is assured that God’s goodness will supply him; if he be wronged, His justice will right

right him ; if he be ignorant of his wants, His Omnipotence “ knows whereof he hath need ; ” if he be in danger, his Omnipresence will watch over him for good ; be he insufficient for himself ? God’s Omnipotence will do all things for him ; be he loaded with trespasses and sins ? His mercy will forgive him ; yea, tho’ he still persist to do wickedly ? God is patient and long-suffering towards him, that he may bring him to repentance.

“ He is every thing to every man : He is redemption, sanctification, and righteousness.”

Whilst the latter (the Atheist)’s views are all melancholy and disconsolate ; the best of his hopes, and the pride of his glory, is, that as “ he comes “ up like a flower,” so he must again be, one day or other, “ cut down,” and then rest in silence for ever. Vain man ! how low, how truly to be pitied !—by no means to be envied, inasmuch as he hath no “ rock of defence,” no “ anchor of “ hope,” nor haven of everlasting joy, to put into, after the storm and conflict of death.

Well would it be for him if death were to make an utter end of him ; but this, which is his glory, will by no means befall him. No man’s disbelief will alter the reality of things. The bare denying God will not destroy men ; but will rather more strongly increase His fury against them. For,

As he is a holy God, so is he also just and terrible ; and will by no means acquit the wicked.

Well

Well therefore might the Psalmist style him “fool, who saith in his heart there is no God.”

It is much to be feared, that not reason, but impiety and irreligion, as I have already shewn, is the whole ground of their unbelief. Men, whose interest it is there should be no God, wish it; and from wishing to believing the distance, we know, is not great. “They are corrupt, and become “abominable;” therefore, to quiet the stings of a guilty conscience, and reconcile themselves to their sinful courses, they banish from their minds both God and a future state. “ Foolish men that “they are,” as if God was the less, because they are the more wicked; as if God was not, because, as their interest is, they would not have him to be.

But, “God sitteth in the Heavens over all, “from the beginning: He reigneth, be the hea-“then never so impatient: He is King,” be the people never so sinful, or disbelieve him; “be “they never so unmindful of Him.”

The proofs in favour of a Deity, were they much weaker than they are, yet deserve to be seriously considered and attended to; because the hazard, on one side, is infinitely great, if religion, which we neglect, be true. For,

Here the good man’s comfort is, and will be, real; and the Atheist, however he may brave it out on earth, whilst all things go smoothly on, will not be able hereafter so much as to lift up his head;

head ; but will be eternally abashed when he feels in himself the dire effects of his own Infidelity and wickedness.

On the other side, there is no hazard at all ; if being received as true, it could at last possibly prove to be a mistake. For,

To believe that there is a God, even though there was none, is altogether beneficial, and without the least prejudice, as being the principle from whence men do good, and are restrained from evil ; whereby no loss is hazarded, but that of our lusts, which are really most prejudicial to us ; or, at the utmost, some temporal convenience (the want of which is abundantly recompensed by the present content and future expectation it affords) ; and without which it would be impossible either to live safely, or die comfortably.

Whereas to think there is no God, or could we only suppose so, yet, this can bring no real advantage, but is really to our hurt.

Because it leaves men equally liable to crosses and pains, to fears and doubts more abundant, and finally to death also ; yea, and leaves nothing to support and comfort instead of them, when every thing in this world fails and forsakes them.

So that, in all cases, the true Believer hath every advantage before the Infidel. Insomuch,

That if a man had arguments sufficient to persuade himself there is no God (although he has infinite

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nite reason to the contrary), yet the belief of so blest, so kind, so indulgent a Being, is so very necessary to the quiet, comfort, and satisfaction of our lives, that a wise man would be tormented and grieved to quit so pleasing an error. Yea,

If there was no God, or could we only suppose so, yet, it is confessedly best that it should be generally believed there is one, that we may be provided against the worst, and not be confident where our opinion can do no good, but really expose us to so much hurt.

Especially since there is all the reason and proof in the world to assure us that there is a God; and the belief whereof hath so general and visible a tendency to the improvement of life, and the refinement of our conduct.

In a word—If the grounds on which religion is founded be false, the religious man, and the strictest observer of all precepts, and of self-denial, ventures no more than the loss of worldly pleasure for a few years—but, if true, the vicious man is, of all others, the most miserable; and we tremble at the very thoughts of what unutterable and incomprehensible torments he is daily heaping upon himself.

But further: Infidelity is not only unreasonable, but sinful also.

Whoever hath sufficient ground afforded him for conviction (and such under the Gospel we all have)

have) is under an obligation to yield his assent; and whoever doth not, sins, not only against natural light, but even against the greatest mercies and blessings that were ever vouchsafed to the world; and is therefore the greatest sin, that, in these days, man is capable of.

Those who have the Gospel propounded to them, and yet continue in unbelief, their case is the most dangerous of any in the world, whether they be speculative or practical Infidels.

As to the former we may guess how great their condemnation will be, from the greatness of their sin in neglecting the encouragements they have received. The Scripture every where gives it a bad character, calling it “ an evil heart of unbelief “ to depart from the living God.”

St. John speaks of Infidelity as the highest affront to God imaginable, and, as it were, giving Him the lie: “ He that believeth not the record “ which God hath given of his Son hath made God “ a lyar;” and we cannot but reasonably suppose that God will severely punish those who put no confidence in Him.

It is but just and reasonable, that they who resist the clearest light should have “ their portion “ in utter darkness.”

As for practical Infidels, those who “ hold the “ truth in unrighteousness,” who in words acknowledge the Gospel, but in works deny it, their condition

condition is altogether as bad as the others ; yea, I had almost said, it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for the former than for them.

He who denies the truth of the Christian religion, and lives contrary to the precepts of it, acts suitable to his principles ; but he that owns the truth of the Gospel, and at the same time lives wickedly, offers violence to those principles which he hath entertained. For,

If we profess ourselves Christians, by that profession we declare to the world that we believe the doctrines of Christianity ; but if, in the midst of this profession, we live contrary to the precepts of the holy Gospel, "in ungodliness and worldly lusts," in the neglect of God, and the duties of religion ; this very profession we have made of the Gospel will be an aggravation of our condemnation.

Do we think, that at the great day of judgment we shall escape by pleading this for ourselves, that we believed the Gospel, and made profession of it ? —no—“out of our own mouths we shall be condemned ;” our very excuse will but aggravate our offence. In a word :

Infidelity destroys and cuts us off from every privilege and blessing of the Gospel, and from all hope of eternal salvation. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved : But he that believeth not shall be damned.”

I shall only add to what hath been already said, that, seeing these things, we "take especial heed to ourselves that there be in none of us an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God;" and in that consideration to think it not only our bounden duty, but also our highest interest, to labour after a true faith:

And, having obtained it, if we would not aggravate our own condemnation, to be especially careful to live according to its precepts.

SERMON

S E R M O N X L.

Of Faith; its Nature, Necessity, &c.—in
Opposition to Infidelity.

JOHN xiv. 1. “*Ye believe in God, believe also
in me.*”

WE may infer from these words, in general terms, that as there is a plain gradation from natural to revealed religion, and a real union and harmony between them; therefore, every honest impartial mind is, at it were, favourably predisposed and induced, by the former, sincerely to believe and practise the latter.

And indeed Christianity, supposing it free from all mixtures of human invention, supposing it rightly stated and truly explained, is doubtless the most reasonable institution in the world.

Nothing can possibly be conceived more worthy of God on the one hand; or more beneficial to man on the other.

Christianity, in this sense, is so far from clashing with the common dictates of reason and morality, that, on the contrary, it mutually illustrates and enforces them ; it explains things with greater clearness, and urges them more strongly upon us ; it adds new sanctions to the law, and motives built upon arguments purely evangelical. Yea,

There is a kind of spirituality in the Gospel which is not to be found elsewhere ; adding heat to the light of reason, and inspiring us with warmer notions ; it draws us more effectually to God, and gives us a foretaste of our spiritual happiness hereafter in Heaven.

From all which we cannot but conclude and infer, that if the deductions of our reason favour so strongly the religion of nature, revealed religion, as it improves the same, and adds thereto excellencies beyond it, hath by much the advantage to recommend itself to our choice : If from reason we “believe in God,” from the advantages of the Gospel, we must much more readily believe in Christ,

“ Ye believe in God, believe also in me.”

Though reason teaches us much in our common duties, yet revelation hath a tendency to our utmost perfection ; and is therefore a blessing which we cannot be too thankful to God for, or careful to retain and improve under.

In further proceeding on these words I shall not so much endeavour to shew the connection between

tween these things, as to state a proper notion of ground and faith in them; together with the necessity and efficacy of it, and our acting under a due influence of the same.

It has been said, that the best actions that were ever done by any Heathens deserve no better name than that of splendid sins: What shall we say then of the seemingly good actions of those who are destitute of that Christian principle from which every Christian virtue proceeds.

Faith in God, and a true belief in Christ and the great doctrines of his Gospel, is the first in order to make men religious; and without which faith even religion itself, could we suppose it in every branch, would profit us nothing. For,

The great end which God designed in his written word, by his Prophets and Apostles, and by the sending his Son, was, to banish Infidelity, and to implant Faith on earth.

We should therefore be careful to improve under these advantages.

The ignorant and superstitious may weakly triumph in a religion which proceeds not upon rational principles, and which it is impossible to explain; but it is the glory of Christianity, as we profess it, to be the friend of reason; and to be able to say unto wisdom, "thou art my sister."

It is only a rational belief in God, and in Christ his Son, in our minds, that can in any way avail us.

A credulous and implicit Faith will make us neither wiser nor better. In order to constitute a true believer, we should know upon what foundation our Faith stands, and be able to assign a reason for our belief in God, and in Jesus Christ his Son, the Saviour of mankind, and the consequent duties flowing from thence. It is for want of this that we see so many professing Christians unstable as water, "carried to and fro with every wind of doctrine."

Others contentedly acquiesce in the profession they were born, and lead lives of total indifference to Christ, because they never examine the truth of their religion; and this, among others, is one great reason why the primitive Christians so much excelled us in the purity and holiness of their lives and conversations.

They took not up their religion on trust, and were not Christians merely because their fathers were such, but they embraced the Faith upon the maturest examination of its evidence, and upon the fullest conviction of its truth and divinity. But,

As to many of us, we should have been Infidels upon the same principles that we are now Christians had we been born of Heathen parents.

A profession thus without Faith, and without principle, (i. e.) without a due knowledge in the grounds of God, of Christ, and our duty, can by no means be acceptable and well-pleasing to God.

It is only such a faith as is embraced upon good and solid reasons, which is the only true faith to be relied on; a true justifying faith, according to knowledge, is the Faith that will both enable us to discover truth, and influence us to live accordingly.

Let us then suffer the things of religion, and of Christianity in particular, to have their due weight upon us: Let us diligently and impartially consider these matters, and not suffer ourselves to be biased by prejudice, passion, or interest to a contrary persuasion.

Thus much, at least, we may with reason desire of men; for, though we cannot believe what we will, yet we may, if we will, consider things seriously and impartially, and yield, or withhold our assent, as we find reason for it, after a careful search and examination.

If any man will offer a serious argument against any of the principles of religion, and will debate the matter soberly, as one that would gladly be satisfied, he deserves to be heard. But,

He who turns religion into railly, and attempts to confute it by bold jests, makes not religion but himself ridiculous, because he sports with his life.

It concerns every one, therefore, who would not trifle away his soul, and fool himself into irrecoverable misery, seriously to enquire into these things, and

and patiently and impartially to consider the arguments brought for them.

We should think that we have not now the making of things true or false: The principles of religion are already settled before we examine them.

The truth of things are already fixed; either there is a God, or no God; our souls are immortal, or they are not; the Scriptures are a divine revelation, or an imposture; one of these is certain and necessary, and cannot now be altered. These things will not comply with our conceits, nor bend to our interests. And,

If, upon enquiry, we are convinced (as every honest heart must) that it is the greatest reason and prudence to believe there is a God and a future state, and that the Scriptures are the word of God; then, let us meditate much on these things; let us attend to the proper consequences of such a persuasion, and resolve to live as becomes those who believe these things.

Let us labour to strengthen ourselves in this belief, because Faith is the spring of all rational actions, and the root of all other graces; according to the strength and weakness of which our holiness, obedience, and graces, will for ever flourish or decay.

Faith hath a natural tendency to good works; our belief in God without this cannot be called Faith. For,

Some

Some sort of Infidelity is at the bottom of every sin ; and, in every wilful transgression of God's law, our assent to, or persuasion of, his being, must be either very weak or imperfect, or really wanting in us, at the time we do amiss.

To believe therefore in God, in its utmost latitude, imports, that we rightly understand and assent to what the Scriptures have revealed concerning Him ; and to conduct our lives accordingly; Yea,

Where true Faith is, there will, of necessity, be also a suitable life and conversation ; for, " with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." A right Faith, we all know, is the foundation of all religion ; but, that which perfects the act of believing, is, a suitable manner and way of living ; our knowledge and belief must not be a bare speculation, but a serious, practical, affecting impression, and deep sense upon the mind, producing its proper effects, (viz.) righteousness, and universal obedience.

This is a very easy and intelligent notion of Faith ; and such as shews plainly that Faith is not a mere speculative act of the understanding, but a substantial, practical, moral virtue, " fruitful in every good work." Indeed,

Whether we respect the nature of Faith, in general, or particular, a little reflection upon the springs and principles of human actions may serve

to

to shew, that Faith, being a firm persuasion of the truths contained in the Gospel, is the first in order, the foundation, the cause, and root, fitted to produce all other Christian virtues, as its proper fruit, and genuine effect.

These effects it doth not always or necessarily produce; for, men are but too often negligent in exerting its powers. But, yet,

They so naturally flow from thence, that, if we carefully attend to it, and duly cherish its suggestions, it will not fail to make us in all points the very persons we ought to be.

The Scripture, therefore, when magnifying the efficacy of Faith, speaks of it, as it is in its own nature, and upon a presumption that the persons possessed of it do their endeavours to keep its impressions always lively and strong; and, where this is done, the inducements to obedience will be found so powerful, and the conditions so reasonable and necessary, that an assured expectation of the former will naturally draw after it a careful discharge of the latter.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to be rooted and well grounded in Faith, which is the common principle of all goodness.

A principle this, so suited to the operations of the rational soul, and whose influence upon our whole behaviour is so universal, that we may say of its efficacy, with regard to the good and evil of

our

our lives, as our blessed Saviour said of his miracles, " According to the strength or weakness " of our Faith, so will it be unto us.

What remains is, to apply what hath been said. And,

First, This shews, that it is for want of Faith that there is so much of irreligion in the world.

Men are not firmly persuaded of the truths which they profess, neither do they suffer them to sink deep into their hearts, in order to their bringing forth fruit to perfection. If we did verily believe the great truths of the Gōspel, we should as certainly walk according to them; yea, did we, as we ought, believe in the being and existence of God, we should dread to offend him: Were we fully persuaded of a future state, we should be restless and impatient till we had secured an interest in it, by making things temporal give place, in all their concerns, to things eternal. Did we verily believe in the word of God, we should study its precepts in order to obey them.

Let men therefore pretend what they will, true Faith will be made evident by works, and we may know them by this, even as a tree is known by its fruits, which is at all times discovered and made manifest by them.

The true cause why men in their lives contradict the precepts of religion, is, because they do not rightly believe in God, nor in Jesus Christ
the

the Son of God, nor in the word which He preached among them ; or (which is the same, only indeed with a greater aggravation of their crime) do not pay due attention or regard to them.

If this Faith was firmly rooted and grounded in men, they could not live wickedly ; for, “ with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.”

Therefore, further, since a Faith and belief in the Gospel truths are so necessary, that our very best works without it are but sin before God, and have withal so great an influence upon religion and morality, how greatly then does it concern us to strive as that we may obtain it ! And, the means hereto are obvious : As,

Frequent meditation on the things before us, of the being and existence of God, the congruity of every part of religion, and the reasonableness and equity of its precepts and doctrines.

Let us especially regard our future state, and its final determinations ; and, to guide us herein, let us be most especially heedful to the written word, as it is peculiarly profitable hereto ; that we may “ be established, rooted, and grounded, in all knowledge ;” that we may be “ perfect and thoroughly furnished unto every good work ;” that we may, at the last, attain the end of our Faith, and the hope of our calling, even our eternal salvation, through Christ, who is the founder of our Faith, “ in whom also we believe.”

In

In a word : As Infidelity destroys and cuts us off from every Christian privilege and blessing, and from all hope of eternal salvation ; So,

On the other hand, Fidelity (i. e. Faith) seals to us every promise of the Gospel ; “ only through “ Faith it is that we inherit the promises ;” and, “ he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

To conclude : As Faith is the spring of all rational actions, and the root of every grace, as well as the seal to us of every Christian privilege, blessing, and hope, so let us therefore be particularly careful to strengthen ourselves in it, according to the power or weakness of which, our holiness, our obedience, and grace, will for ever flourish or decay ; yea, and will only, before God, be esteemed and accounted by it.

Let us therefore get Faith, and do our utmost to retain it ; yea, “ get it, and forget it not ;” and in all our obedient performances have a particular regard thereto. For,

“ Without Faith it is impossible to please God.”

As we have Faith therefore in our Lord Jesus Christ in all things, and in the Father and Holy Spirit, and in what they have done for, and taught us, so we must be careful in all things to conform thereto ; for, “ he only that doth righteousness in “ God’s account is righteous.” According therefore to the extent of our Faith so must our works be ; for, “ he only is born of God who doth the “ will of his Father which is in Heaven.”

S E R M O N X L L

Against Strife, &c.

GAL. v. 19, 20. “ *The Works of the Flesh are manifest, which are these,* Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife.*”

THESE are some of that catalogue of vices which the Apostle cautions the people of Galatia (and in them all succeeding ages of mankind in general) to avoid ; not only by reason of their bad consequences to them hereafter, but also as they are a sign, a sure mark and characteristic of their reprobation from God, and the evils which they here bring to men.

The words before us relate only to matters of Hatred, Wrath, Strife, and the like—to which I shall speak,

First, As to their nature and ill consequences—and then,

Secondly, To the remedies—the means and considerations whereby to avoid it. And,

First,

* For the Omission here, see Ser. LXXXIII. Vol. V.

First, As to the nature of the vice: Much need not here be spoken, neither indeed can be, it being rather to be conceived than expressed; save that it is the disquiet of kingdoms, and confusion of parties; supplanting of peace and quietness, and security among men, and planting in its stead all sedition and tumults, with every disorder that is destructive, either to the ornament or happiness of human life; for, where strife and envying is, there "is confusion, and every evil work."

With regard to the ill consequences of this sin, it is of so complicated a nature, that a particular and minute detail of them here, would not only be tedious, but impossible; as it is differently exemplified, according to the different degrees wherein it is encouraged, and according to the different malign dispositions of those in whom it is firmented.

Who, but according to the various opportunities offered him, can help observing the horrible and unusual deformity of visage those are subject to, who are actuated herewith!—what agonies of mind, what disorder of spirits, what fury and frenzy it hurries a man into!

More particularly we are to add hereto the multitude of evils attending hereon.

Defamation is its least ill attendant, and the ill-will of every serious opponent.

Not to mention that we hereby gain to ourselves the scorn and contempt of every beholder, who

will point us out as a proverb of reproach to be avoided of all men.

These are but few of the many ill consequences which naturally retort upon the fame and reputation of him who is of a contentious spirit.

The evils of it are no less hurtful to the body.

“ Who hath wounds ?—who hath maiming ?—
“ who hath putrifying sores ?—even he that is fond
“ of strife, and who seeketh contention as for hid
“ treasure.”

Men who are factious, contentious, and violent, usually bring many calamities upon themselves, which in the end perhaps may terminate in their ruin. At least,

They are continually involved in feuds and animosities, ever hating and hated, doing and receiving injuries ; and perhaps die at last in the same unfriendly disposition.

Not to add, that many times, even in a natural way, “ the end of these things is death ; ” and men are hurried out of the world in the midst of wrath ; most assuredly a very unfit condition to appear in at the great and terrible day of judgment ?

No man can tell to what lengths strife encouraged may arrive. It is the observation of the wise man, that “ the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water ; ” and therefore very prudently, as well as kindly, cautions us, to “ let go contention before it be meddled with.”

As

As “ water (having vent) runneth apace, and maketh the former breach still wider, so doth the contention of him that is of an hasty spirit.”

Though therefore the evil of strife be but small at the beginning (as God knows it but seldom is), yet, in a little time, it may arrive to a great and prodigious height, and be the instrument and occasion of the blackest sins.

These are evils which immediately respect a man’s self. But,

This is not all; it may be, and as frequently is, the occasion of as much evil to our neighbours, and for which we shall be wholly answerable, if through our offence; though at the same time truly destructive, and of the most pernicious consequence to the unfortunate.

These, in themselves, even in this life one would think are reasons fully sufficient to dissuade therefrom: Disquiet, dislike, and an evil name are what we generally wish to avoid. But,

There are many considerations, besides the present ill consequences attending the vice before us, wherefore to avoid it.

The very frame and make of our constitution, together with that reason which is given us for our guidance in all our affairs, should induce us to a different and more courteous demeanour.

Were we of savage cast, we might then well be allowed the ferocity of our nature.

But for men, of so noble a make, and endued with reason, more and exceeding mildness is expected from them, and that, towards all men : “If ye then bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

As this is but too generally the effect of the vice before us, I shall here add a few words respecting that fashionable mode of deciding strife by Duel.

Perhaps false honour has been as destructive to mankind as false religion : We ought therefore to make a distinction between real and apparent honour. Under which of these classes shall we rank this vice?—undoubtedly under the latter. What comparison is there between the fatal effects of it, and the testimony of a good conscience?—and of what importance is the idle opinion of the world, set in competition with true honour, whose foundation is rooted in the heart?—can we be deprived of virtues we really possess, by false aspersions of calumny?—will it be said that this shews a man to have courage, and that it is sufficient to efface the dishonour, and prevent the reproach due to all other vices? On such principles as these we need only be guilty of it to efface the guilt and remembrance of all others, and every offence is equally washed away by the blood of the offended and the offender. If wolves themselves could reason, could they entertain maxims more inhuman than these?

Let

Let us recollect, that true honour is not of a fickle or changeable nature. It does not depend on time, place, or prejudice; it can neither be annihilated nor generated anew; but has its constant source in the heart of the virtuous man, and in the unalterable rules of his conduct. Let us recollect whether a man of real honour, when his own life, or that of another, is in question, is to be governed by the mode of the times, or by his own heart; and whether it be not a greater instance of his courage to despise than to follow the prejudices of the world: Such a man will never make a deliberate attempt upon the life of another,* nor expose his own life to satisfy a barbarous and fatal prejudice, which has no foundation in reason or nature. If humanity be the basis of every virtue, what must be the thought of that man whose blood-thirsty and depraved disposition prompts him to seek the life of his fellow-creature? In truth, a good citizen owes his life to his country, and has not a right to dispose of it without the permission of its laws, and much less in direct opposition to them.

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* When Mark Anthony (after the Battle of Actium) challenged Augustus, he took no further notice of the insult than sending back this answer: (viz.)

" If Anthony was weary of his life, there were other ways of dispatch besides fighting him; and, for his part, he should not trouble himself to be his executioner."

He who affects to meet death without fear is a liar. All men fear to die: It is a law with all sensible beings, without which every species of mortals would soon be destroyed. This fear is the simple emotion of nature, and is just and conformable to the nature of things. What, though it be true, that a man is despised who refuses it, which contempt is most to be feared, that of others for doing well, or that of ourselves for having acted ill? Probity and virtue depend not on the opinion of the world, but on the nature of things; and the virtuous man, whose whole life has been irreproachable, will refuse to stain his hand with blood, and will only be the more respected for such refusal. Indeed, nothing is less honourable than that honour about which the world so much contends, and which is nothing more than an absurd custom, a false imitation of virtue, which prides itself in the greatest crimes. Our honour is not in the power of another: It depends on ourselves, and not on the opinion of the world: Its defence is neither in the sword nor in the buckler, but in a life of integrity and virtue—a proof of greater courage than to brave death in a duel.

But further: As no vice is more mischievous in its own nature, or more destructive of the peace and happiness of mankind, than strife and contention; and is also so thoroughly against reason and the ingenuity of men; so nothing is more directly

directly contrary to the end and design of that religion which our blessed Saviour came to establish in the world.

This, above all things, labours to inspire peace and good-humour, love and tenderness, meekness and mutual respect towards all men; virtues these that make society useful, and conversation sweet and easy. But,

These can never consist with those fretful and fiery dispositions which flame out into passion upon every trifle; and, where justly provoked, exceed beyond measure.

St. Paul, in his charge to Timothy, expressly enjoins, that "the servant of the Lord must not strive;" and though these words are more peculiarly understood to be of those that are in charge over the Church, yet, the Apostle likewise requires the same thing of all Christians in general. For,

He bids Titus to put those under his care in mind, that "they speak evil of no man; that they be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness to all men."

"If therefore ye have bitter strife and envyings in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth: " "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish." Yea,

"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

No marvel then that the Apostle, after the mention of these things, expressly says, that they who do them “shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”

The Apostle, by styling these “the works of the flesh,” plainly intimates the malignity of their nature, and the final tendency of them; but, lest any one should mistake in a case so evident, he positively and plainly asserts, as he had already told them in times past, that “they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The final issue of these things is not only the deprivation of all happiness, but also the being adjudged to endless and interminable misery: “They who do these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God;” and again, “The end of these things is death.”

As we shall hereby be secluded from the peaceable enjoyments of this life, so shall we be also, if we continue therein, from the blissful ravishments of a better. For,

“The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, “(things which we here so often contend for,) “but righteousness and peace, and joy in the “Holy Ghost.” “All things that offend or hurt “will be gathered out of that holy mountain.”

As to the remedies whereby to avoid these things, they are briefly, the avoiding the contentious person, or, if that is not possible, then, the giving

giving him a soft answer in meekness and truth ; and to avoid all unruly lusts which do in an especial manner disturb the peace of mankind.

The first of these is always to be observed, if possible. For,

“ The wicked go about stirring up strife all the day long.” Only therefore can we be secure from their danger when we are at a distance from their contagion.

The Apostle is particularly urgent hereto ; charging us, that “ if any be a railer, or contentious, with such an one not even to eat.” And,

The reason is truly evident, lest we be caught by their infection, or share in their general malevolence. But,

As the present state of affairs are in the world, these things cannot always be ; but we must, in despite of our utmost care, sometimes converse with men of an evil heart : It will therefore be no mean piece of wisdom, in us, to fortify ourselves at all times against them in all meekness and submission.

The wise man hath very justly observed, that “ a soft answer turneth away wrath ; but grievous words stir up anger.”

Agreeable whereto is that advice of St. Peter : “ Be ready always to give an answer, with meekness and reverence, that those who speak evil of you, and accuse you, may be ashamed.”

A calm

A calm and gentle way of vindicating ourselves is the most effectual means to work confusion in such as would calumniate and reproach us.

There are many proofs in holy Writ to the purpose before us: Esau was a rough man as well in his inward disposition as outward behaviour; and it is probable, by his bringing four hundred men with him, that he came with a full purpose of being revenged on his brother, according to his former resolution. But,

How did the mild and humble expressions of Jacob, in styling him Lord, and himself a Servant, soften the rugged, and otherwise inflexible disposition of Esau; insomuch, that, instead of taking revenge, he offers kindness unto him.

Of what kind of temper was Saul?—how full of passion, fierceness, cruelty, and enmity was he against David! And,

How impatiently he desired and thirsted after his ruin, is evident from his secret underminings of, and open pursuit after him: Yet,

This harsh and cruel disposition of his was strangely wrought upon by the mild and humble carriage of David, who refused even an opportunity to hurt him when it was in his power, styling him, “his Lord and Father,” “the Lord’s Anointed,” and “King of Israel.” This had such effect upon him, that he melted into tears of kindness and compassion; he acknowledged him for

for a son, and committed to him, as to his dearest friend, the care of his posterity.

The time would fail me to speak of the men of Ephraim,* of Eli,† and of David,‡ also, who were all subdued through kindness.

What I have observed is founded in the nature and reason of things; and I may appeal to every man's observation for the truth of it. “He then that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” But further:

Another and very useful method hereto, is, to forego all our unruly lusts.

It is the Apostle's observation, “ whence (says he) comes strife and contentions among you? “ Come they not from hence, even of your lusts “ which war in your members? The unruly lusts of men, when let loose in quest of their different objects, cannot fail, in their various malign inclinations, of running counter and meeting with others who will be equally eager in their pursuits, and as impatient of restraint under any opposition. And,

What the consequence of this must be, is too obvious to need here any enlargement; save, that as they cannot both obtain it, they will each contend for the preference.

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* Judges viii. 1, &c. † I. Sam. i. 15, 17. § I. Sam. xxv. 10, &c.

What I have already said respects strife, as existing between ourselves and others. And,

If this be so evil a thing, even where our interests may sometimes be the occasion, what, and how great must its sin and deformity be in those who make it their amusement to sow strife and contention among their neighbours, whilst themselves, the promoters, are the amused observers of others' aggravation!—and of which sort there are but too many in the world; but, this is to chuse evil for its own sake, as such, and is contrary to every end, and all the intents and injunctions of religion, which is to increase and promote peace among ourselves and all men, as far as in us lies, to the mutual good of mankind in general; the which to frustrate by strife and contention, or by our evil commotions of others, is therefore a sure sign of a rough and unhewn spirit, not as yet reduced from its natural ferocity, nor polished by education, nor made gentle by civil converse.

This vice is one of the “seven things” taken notice of by Solomon as an abomination to the Lord, (viz.) “him that soweth discord among brethren.” Yea,

This vice and practice is truly diabolical; for, as the reconciling enemies is the work of God, so the separating friends is the work of the Devil.

To conclude: As strife is so turbulent a vice, and so destructive to the peace and quiet of all societies,

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societies, it is hoped, that a due consideration of the thing itself, together with what hath been here laid down, will be sufficient to induce us to " lay aside all bitterness and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice ;" as knowing, that " it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression," and " an honour to cease from strife ;" and that, upon the experience we have had of the mischief of mutual exasperations, we may now apply ourselves to the most effectual means for composing the spirits of men, and healing their differences ; that laying aside all other provocations, we may make this our study and delight, to " consider one another, to provoke unto love, and to good works."

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SERMON XLII.

Of Love, Gentleness, Meekness, &c.

GAL. v. 22, 23. “But the *Fruit of the Spirit is*
“*Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness,*
“*Meekness.*”

IT is not my design to speak to these words as so many several virtues, but to consider them as a collective head, particularly opposed to those “works of the flesh” just before mentioned, (viz.) “Hatred, Variance, Emulation, Wrath, Strife,” and which have been as collectively considered and argued against.

Benevolence, Good-nature, and Affability towards all men, are virtues by no means of least value amongst us; nay, rather is of chief esteem, being here prefixed by the Apostle in the first rank of Christian graces, and “fruits of the Spirit,” which “are not only to the praise and glory of God,” but “are also good and beneficial to men.”

In enlarging on which subject, I shall shew,

First,

First, The nature thereof, and its necessity—
And then,

Secondly, What obligation we are all under to perform it.

Concluding with the great motives we have to engage therein.

As to its nature, it signifies, the being civil and obliging in our outward carriage and behaviour towards others ; and imports, all gentleness of manners, and sweetness and affability of conversation.

It is that tender and gentle disposition of the mind, whereby a man is disposed to order his discourse, and outward behaviour, so as not only to be innocent and inoffensive, but agreeable and acceptable to all.

It is a virtue, by which we observe a decency in all our words and actions ; thereby behaving towards others in all the relations in which we stand to one another ; giving to all their due, and that deference of place and respect which their station and circumstances respectively require from us.

As to the expediency of this virtue, it is so necessary for the living with any comfort in society, that it ever was in esteem, even with Heathens and Idolaters ; and, whatever absurdities they ran into in point of religious ceremonies, and rites of worship, they always looked upon Love, Gentleness, and Affability, as necessary to sweeten life, and make agreeable all our conversation. And,

In proportion to their knowledge and skill in learning and arts, were noted for humanity and complaisance, so as from thence to be distinguished, from less cultivated people, by the style of *civilized nations*; and agreeable hereto, all persons of good extraction, and polite education, in all countries, whether they profess to be guided by the dictates of religion or no, are particularly desirous of being esteemed masters of this virtue, as an accomplishment altogether necessary in persons of their condition; and indeed as a qualification, in some sort, peculiar to them. But,

Although this is a proof of the value and excellency of this virtue, (for which reason I mention it) yet we shall be led into error, if we think that it is a duty peculiar to men of birth only, and who are of liberal education.

Though the want of it is more disgraceful and faulty in such, than in others, yet, it is alike the duty of all; and is doubtless, in frequent instances, practised in a greater degree by those from whom it is less expected, than by such who from their station are much more blameable for neglecting it.

It is indeed a duty which results from every relation that can be supposed to subsist between one another in life, and without which not even the greatest, or the meanest, can live happy.

This leads me,

Secondly,

Secondly, To shew, what obligations we are all under to perform it. And here,

The nature of God, the relation we stand in to one another, and our own interest, do most strongly enforce it upon us.

When we consider God, nothing is so conspicuous as his greatness and majesty ; and yet, in his word, nothing is more remarkable than his attention to soften that greatness, and to place it in the mildest and most gentle light.

When his Son came into the world, He was eminent for the same attribute of mild and gentle goodness. And,

As the Son of God is the pattern, so the Holy Ghost is the inspirer of gentleness. His name is, the Comforter, the Spirit of Grace and Peace. His fruits or operations on the human mind "are, Love, Joy, Long-suffering, Gentleness, "Meekness."

It is the only virtue that will have an everlasting continuance ; when every thing else shall fail, and time itself go out into eternity ; only love and praise shall endure for ever, and vie with each other in Heaven to endless ages.

Thus by every discovery of the Godhead, &c. honour is conferred upon Love and Gentleness, and suitable to such discoveries is the whole strain of the Gospel ; as if the design of the Revelation we have from God was to promote and establish

establish the great duty of Brotherly-love and Gentleness, " Peace on earth, and Good-will among " men."

Let not then such powerful and winning examples, together with the many authentic precepts for it, be without their proper influence upon us. But further :

As the example and law of God oblige us to the practice of the duty before us, so does also the relation we bear to one another.

It is evident, by the original order and constitution of nature, that men are so framed and made, that they necessarily want each other's help and assistance for their mutual support and preservation ; society is absolutely necessary for them, and the bond of all society is mutual Love and Friendship. And,

As all men are obliged to this by the necessary law of nature, so they are also strongly prompted to it by the natural inclinations of their own minds, when uncorrupt and not biassed by prejudice or passion.

Gentleness therefore is what man, as such, in every station, is indebted to man ; accordingly, as all feel the claim which they have hereto, so all are sensibly hurt by the want of it in others. But,

If what hath been already said be insufficient to recommend the virtue before us, let us consider,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, How deeply our own interest is concerned therein.

Every virtue is profitable, as it is a behaviour suitable to right reason, and an act of obedience to the commands of God, and as it conduces to our salvation. But,

Besides these, the virtue before us hath some peculiar advantages to recommend itself to us.

Whatever ends a good man can be supposed to pursue, Gentleness will be found to favour them. It prepossesses and wins every heart; it persuades, when every other argument fails; it often disarms the fierce, and melts the stubborn.

As strife is the disquiet of kingdoms, and the supplanter of peace, so Love and Gentleness, Courtesy and Good-nature, are the means and promoters of every thing that is conducive either to the ornament or happiness of life.

It is the nurse of peace and friendship, and mightily contributes to the pleasure, as well as usefulness of society: It is in truth the great avenue to mutual enjoyment. Amidst the strife of interfering interests, it tempers the violence of contention, and keeps alive the seeds of harmony: It softens animosities, renews endearments, and renders the countenance of man a refreshment to man. Yea,

The importance of a social spirit to the happiness of society—of obliging condescension in superiors.—of respectfulness and deference in inferiors—of desire

desire to please, and willingness to be pleased, amongst equals, are points too evident to need here any proof, and, one would think, cannot easily be overlooked.

Were Gentleness to be banished from the earth, and the world filled with none but the harsh and contentious, the solitude of the desert would then be even preferable to it. But,

Whatever may be the effect of this virtue on our external condition, its influence on our internal enjoyment is certain and powerful. When benignity and gentleness reign within, we are then capable of feeling every pleasure; and every person, and every occurrence, are beheld in the most favourable light. Thus the gentle are happily secluded from the numberless discomposures which agitate vulgar minds. But further :

This virtue has another still more important connection with our interest, by means of that relation which our present behaviour bears to our eternal state. Heaven is the region of gentleness and friendship, as Hell is of fierceness and animosity. "All things that offend will be gathered out of the holy mountain."

It may perhaps be objected and said, that with regard to trifles, men may be allowed the indulgence of their malignant dispositions. But,

Let them remember well, that these trifles, by increasing the growth of peevishness and passion, become

become pregnant with the most serious mischiefs, and may fit them, before they are aware, for being the future companions of none but infernal spirits.

Let us then respect our characters as men, and as Christians, and the twofold advantage of the virtue before us, respecting the interests both of this and a better life.

Let us reflect on the small moment of those things which are the usual incentives to violence and contention; and in our thoughts contemplate and lay hold of the more enduring substance which is set before us. Let the prospects of immortality fill our minds; and let us consider ourselves as engaged in the pursuit of higher interests, as acting now, under the eye of God, an introductory part to a more important scene.

Elevated by such sentiments, our minds will become calm and sedate; we shall look down, as from a superior station, on the petty disturbances of the world, and shall treat with the mildness of a more exalted nature, what, in little minds, would call forth all the bitterness of rancour and passion.

Thus Gentleness is our safeguard and security; is our present enjoyment, and the earnest of our future expectance; yea, "against this there is no law." And,

We may also add, with the Apostle, in another place, that "it is the fulfilling of the law." Now, To

To be no transgressors, and to be beyond the reach of the law, is no small comfort. But,

To be the fulfillers of it must be exceeding consolation, as we are hereby not only free from danger of suffering its penalties, but are also entitled to every privilege and security of it in present enjoyment, and the full expectation of all the blessings which it promises hereafter.

How many blessings, only differently expressed, doth our Saviour pronounce upon the virtue before us!—

“Blessed (says He) are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven:”

“Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth:”

“Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy:”

“Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God.” Yea, and every one who feeth these things in us “will rise up, and call us blessed.”

As to the natural tendency of the above beatitudes, in the nature of the thing itself, in their temporal respects, daily experience confirms the truth of them to us. And,

As to their future expectations, we may rest assuredly of them, as “God is true.”

What,

What, therefore, after all these things, shall put us beyond so exceeding an advantage, and so great and happy a composure? In a word:

The duty before us is usually an indication of wisdom, and greatness of mind; it is profitable to human society, acceptable to God, and pleasing to men; it is advantageous to our quiet, to our honour, and safety; and, therefore, upon all these accounts, yea, and "above all things," may justly challenge our attention and study in order to practice.

" As much therefore as lieth in you, if it be possible, live peaceably with all men;" and, " love as brethren."

I shall add to this that excellent eulogium of the royal Prophet on the virtue before us: " Behold, " how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to " dwell together in unity !

" It is like the precious ointment upon the head, " that ran down unto the beard, even unto Aaron's " beard, and went down to the skirts of his cloathing." It is of so high a value as to be compared to the most costly things, rich odours, and precious ointment; and equally diffuses itself over the whole man. Yea,

" It is like the dew of Hermon, which fell upon " the hill of Sion; for, there the Lord promised his " blessing, and life for evermore."

Happy is the man then who hath sown in his breast the seeds of benevolence, the produce thereof shall be Charity and Love.

“ From the fountain of his heart shall rise rivers of goodness; and the streams shall overflow for the benefit of mankind.

“ He calmeth the fury, he healeth the quarrels of angry men, and preventeth the mischiefs of strife and animosity.

“ He promoteth in his neighbourhood peace and good-will, and his name is repeated with praise and benedictions.”

1742. K. O. 16. R. 1. 3.

S E R M O N X L I I I .

Against Evil-speaking.

TITUS iii. 2. “*Speak evil of no Man.*”

THERE are several reasons for which Christians ought to be exhorted to refrain from Evil-speaking—As

First, It is not only a mean and shameful, but a pernicious fault, producing much harm to society; and is the cause why many live hated, and hating one another, and die in the same unfriendly disposition.

Secondly, It is a common and wide-spread evil; and very few are entirely free from it.

“ Who is he (saith the wise son of Sirach) that “ hath not offended with his tongue?”

“ In many things (saith St. James) we offend “ all;” and, “ if any man offend not in word, the “ same is perfect;” for, “ the tongue is an unruly “ evil, full of deadly poison.”

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Thirdly,

Thirdly, They who are addicted to it, either seldom reflect upon its odious nature, either are not sensible when, and how often they thus offend, or have several plausible, though vain excuses, to justify themselves. And,

Lastly, Unless we endeavour to avoid it, and in some good measure become masters of ourselves herein, all our other pretences to religion are vain. For,

“ If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”

Upon these accounts therefore it is necessary, that it should be set in a true light, and have its share of rebuke amongst other vices; from which we are commanded in Scripture to abstain ourselves, and also to dissuade others therefrom.

As to the excuses which men plead in their vindication herein, they are some of them truly allowable, and also matter of strict duty; as in the case of notorious offenders, where public justice requires that we should speak the truth of them, though ever so evil; “ that justice may be ministered righteously,” in order to their suppression; but, this is a duty which we are seldom called upon and compelled to practice. Again:

We may also speak of the faults of others, when we can hope thereby to reclaim them, and shame them to better actions. Or,

When

When a person becomes a proverb of reproach, we may point him out to others, as an example, suffering the punishment of his sins.

These are particular instances, and to which more perhaps might be added ; though even here, as in most other cases, change of circumstances may greatly alter the nature of things, and may make it no easy matter to fix the bounds between right and wrong.

To this general rule therefore we ought to keep, (viz.) to be very cautious and reserved in speaking even the ill of others which we know to be true ; and to abstain therefrom, unless upon good and warrantable reasons, lest we should be thought to act out of malice, secret revenge, or even from an inward pleasure in revealing the faults of others ; than which nothing can be more base, and who generally receive part of their just reward in the contempt and abomination which is usually bestowed upon them.

Men have their bad and their good qualities ; in speaking of them therefore we should have regard to both, otherwise, by exposing all that is faulty in a man, and by suppressing all that is commendable, we make him appear far worse than he really is.

They that will observe nothing in a wise man but his oversights and follies ; nothing in a good man but his failings and infirmities, may render them very despicable. If one should heap

together all the passionate speeches—all the froward and imprudent actions of the best man—all that he hath said or done amiss in his whole life, and present it all at one view, concealing his wisdom and virtues, the man, in this disguise, would look like a madman or fury; and yet, if his life were fairly represented, just in the same manner it was led, and his many and great virtues set over against his infirmities and failings, he would appear to all the world an admirable and excellent person; but, how many or great soever a man's ill qualities may be, it is but just that, with all his heavy load of faults, he should have his praise of the few and real virtues that are in him.

To judge impartially, we are to put mens' good qualities in the balance against their bad ones; and if the scale of the first outweighs, the latter ought not to be brought into the account. Besides,

He may have since been sensible of his fault; and by repentance and amendment God hath forgiven him.

Ought not man therefore to cease from a remembrance of it?—and shall no time nor honourable series of virtuous actions obliterate it from before us? Truly happy is it for us, that “the thoughts of God are not as our thoughts, “nor his ways as our ways.” Again:

What

What evil is occasioned hereby on both sides ; leading men but too often to the commission of those sins for which they were first unjustly accused.

When men find that their reputation cannot by any means be preserved, right and wrong then become equal to them ; and they are but too often equally led to the commission of the most atrocious sins : Solomon, very significantly, stiles this “ teaching men an evil lesson against themselves.”

Although the praise of men is but a poor reason why a man should undertake great and generous actions, yet it is, I fear, too often the true one.

This then is a sore evil to the patient, and for which the slanderer is, in a great measure, to be charged, and will, in a very large sense, at the last day, be answerable for. But,

Where things do not come to this evil crisis, it is certainly a very great wrong done him, and provocation.

If the evil we say of others be not true, it is an injury beyond imagination, and all possible reparation ! and, though we should afterwards endeavour their vindication, yet, possibly, it may not reach so far as the reproach ; or, if it should, may yet perhaps be of no effect, after contrary impressions are once received. A scandal, when it is once gone abroad, is not easily recalled ; for, meeting with so general an inclination to provoke it,

it, it is not only apt to spread itself wide, but the further it spreads the more it usually increases its malignity ; so that the first author of it neither knows to how vast an account the injury he has done may swell, nor how to make any valuable satisfaction for it, if he should. Yea,

Considering the contagious nature of it, who knows where, or when, or at what distance of time it may break out afresh ; nor consequently determine, with any certainty, what prejudice it may do the injured party.

At best, it is always matter of grief to the person defamed ; and Christianity (where otherwise no good is to be expected) requires us to be meek and gentle towards, and, instead of provoking one another to anger by these ways, that, contrarywise, we are to do it by all kind and gentle persuasions to “ love and to good works.” But further :

The consequences of this vice are as bad, or worse to ourselves.

Whoever is wont to speak evil of others, gives a bad character of himself.

Such discourse is produced by bad causes, and proceeds from a corrupted heart : All the good and wise that hear us will judge us accordingly, and strongly suspect, that, as we are capable of traducing others to them, we may traduce them to others also, and consequently guard against and despise us as the common nuisance and pest of society.

Society. We are apt perhaps to imagine, that by lessening another's credit we set ourselves off to greater advantage; But,

We ought to consider, that the world hath equally an eye upon our conduct, and the same right to make a judgment of us as we have to sit upon the actions of others; and that it will judge of us, not from our declaiming against their vices and defects, and the elevation we would thereby give ourselves over them, but from our own personal qualifications and behaviour,

The very moment we attack the reputation of another, we awaken and excite the curiosity of those to whom we vilify him, to lay us in the balance, and to enquire, whether we also are not men of like passions ourselves, and by what indirect views or motives we are actuated.

Upon which enquiries something may be discovered which we should have found more advantageous in concealing. At least,

Our defaming others by lies and slanders may be the occasion of their speaking the truth by us; and then perhaps we shall have no occasion to glory.

It is well worthy consideration what our Saviour says in this very case, that "with what measure we mete to others, it shall be measured to us again;" and that many times "heaped up and running over;" for, there is hardly anything wherein mankind use more strict justice and

equa!lity

equality than in “ rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing.”

Revenge often goes further than words: A reproachful and slanderous man is often embroiled in bloodshed and murder; and, though neither of these great mischiefs should happen to us, yet, this may be inconvenient enough to us many other ways.

No man knows in the various chances of things, and mutability of human affairs, whose kindness and good-will he may hereafter stand in need of; and, if such should be, how incapable will this carriage render us of it! Yea,

If our enemy should be incapable of forgiveness, give him an opportunity to revenge a spiteful and needless word by a shrewd turn.

So that, did a man only consult his own safety and quiet, he ought to refrain from Evil-speaking.

“ What man is he then that loveth life, and fain would see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; let him seek peace and pursue it.”

Solomon also, who has laid down so many excellent rules and instructions for the conduct of human life, is very copious on this head:—

“ A fool’s lips (saith he) entereth into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes:” “ A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul:” Again, “ Whoso keepeth his

“ his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from trouble.” But,

Why need I multiply authorities to confirm what is so very obvious, and what almost every person can attest from his own experience.

It is the express command of God himself ;
“ Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer
“ among thy people.”

“ Let all bitterness, therefore, and wrath, and
“ anger, and clamour, and Evil-speaking, be put
“ away from you, with all malice. But further :

There is an infinitely greater danger still in reserve, (viz.) if we allow ourselves in this evil practice, all our religion is good for nothing. So St. James expressly tells us.

St. Paul puts “ slanderers and revilers” among those “ that shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Our blessed Saviour hath told us, that “ by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned.”

To which I shall add the counsel of the wise man : “ Refrain thy tongue from backbiting, “ for there is no word so secret that shall go for “ nought, and the mouth that slandereth slayeth “ the soul.”

As Evil-speaking then is of such dire consequences to the fate of mankind, it highly becomes all

all true lovers of peace, neither to allow it in themselves, nor to countenance or encourage it in others; but to shew their dislike and detestation of it upon all occasions, as the great bane and pest of society: This may be easily done; for,

Slanderers and Evil-speakers flourish and play only in the sun-shine, (i. e.) where they meet with a kind and favourable reception.

Disapprove of their ways, and they are gone: According to the saying of Solomon, “ As the north-wind driveth away rain, so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.”

As to the excuses which men plead for this evil practice, they are but aggravations.

We are not to plead one sin in excuse for another, and make revenge an apology for reviling.

If it be alledged, that we do it to discourage vice, it is but too plain, that the common way we take hereto is a full confutation of our argument.

If the real reformation of our brother was the only avowed object before us, we should take a different method, and not publickly expose his faults, which will probably harden him in his sin; for, when a sinner finds that his crimes are become public, he, but too commonly, goes on “ with an high hand,” in bold defiance, as knowing, that when his character is once publickly branded, his former good name is almost irretrievable,

trievable, and repentance, should it ensue, will scarce be credited.

If therefore this were our object, (viz.) the reformation of mankind, we should, as we are divinely counselled, "tell it to our brother alone;" or, at most, "if he should not hear us, in the presence of two or three," who may second our good reasons of persuasion, and bind him down more strongly to a better conduct.

The very means therefore which we take are destructive of the end we pretend to aim at, and shews plainly, that we are actuated by other motives than those of mere charity to the souls of men, and the good of our fellow-creatures. But,

Were this really the case, yet, we are not to punish one fault in our brother, by being guilty of another ourselves. For,

We are not to be ignorant, that God hath expressly commanded us not to judge, lest we also be judged; and that it is less criminal in His eyes to commit faults which we repent of, than to accuse our brethren rashly.

The more the Lord has preserved us from excesses, which require repentance, the more compassionate ought we to be to those who give way to them, as our exemption is the pure effect of his mercy, and for which we should ascribe no merit to ourselves. In a word:

There will be always bad men enough to reproach the evil for their doings; and there is no need at all that good men should be concerned in the odious work.

Let no man therefore presume upon impunity, on the one hand, nor despair on the other; for, this business will be sufficiently done.

We may safely trust an ill-natured world, that there will be no failure of justice in this kind.

With regard to mens' natural infirmities, and lower qualifications, which take up so great a share of the detractor's conversation, when we read that man was created in the image of God, what can we infer from hence, but that to revile, or speak evil of any man, must involve in it some degree of contempt of that Being whose image he bears. Yea,

When Revelation informs us, that every good Christian is "the temple of the Holy Ghost;" and that mens' various endowments are the gifts of that "one and self-same Spirit who divideth to every man severally as he will,"

The lowest abilities, in this view, appear by no means proper objects of censure or reproach.

He that, on this account, despiseth, "despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit." And,

To every such vain boaster we may, with great propriety, address the Apostle's exhortation:—

"Who

“ Who maketh thee to differ from another, and
“ what hast thou that thou didst not receive ? ”

Instead therefore of glorying in our several receipts, or setting at nought our brother because we suppose him to have received less, it would become us rather to improve, with thankfulness, the several talents committed to our trust, lest they should be taken from us and given to others who would bring forth their fruit in due season.

Especially, according to that just argument of our Saviour, “ The more is given us, the more “ again will be required from us.”

As to the calamities of men—when we see God’s hand heavy upon others, it is no part of our business to judge them, but ourselves; and by repentance to prevent what our own sins have deserved. To reproach and revile any that are in affliction is that cruelty taken notice of by the Psalmist as the height of wickedness: “ They “ persecute them whom Thou hast smitten, and “ talk to the grief of those whom Thou hast “ wounded.” In all the miseries of others, compassion becomes a debt to them: How unjust then are they, who, instead of paying them that debt, “ add worm-wood to their bitterness,” and afflict them with scorn and reproach !

Therefore, insult not misery, neither deride infirmity, nor ridicule deformity: The first shews inhumanity; the second folly; and the third pride.

He that made him miserable, made thee happy to lament him :

He that made him weak, made thee strong to support him :

He that made him deformed, if He hath made thee otherwise, shew not ingratitude to thy great Creator, by despising any of his creatures ; well-knowing, that at the great day, after the resurrection, he who in this life hath behaved himself most wisely will then have the most beautiful and glorified body, and will shine so for ever and ever.

With regard to mens' real faults and miscarriages—when our Lord declares that our treatment of our brethren here shall be the measure of his proceedings with us hereafter, and at the last day, how unreasonable, yea, and I may say, dangerous, must uncharitable censures be ! But,

It would be a great preservative against this practice if men would consider how they are apt to be affected themselves, when this becomes their case.

As bad as they are, are they not fond of the praise of men, and the concealment of all their defects, of all their sins and faults ?

Nothing then surely is more equal, or reasonable, than that well-known rule “ of doing to “ others as we would have them do unto us.” But further :

Another

Another means whereby to prevent this Evil-speaking, would be, to mind ourselves and our own concerns ; for, “ Idleness is the root of all “ evil.” Above all :

The injury hereby done to the person defamed should, in a most especial manner, keep us herefrom.

A good name is of so great a value as to be above the price of the “ gold of Ophir ;” and therefore not wantonly to be tossed about, as of men only in sport : “ It is better than precious “ ointment ;” yea, and, in many cases, than even life itself.

What therefore is of so great a value should be valued above all things, and had in chief esteem, and under especial care. But,

Lastly, If none of these things can move us to any due regard hereto, yet, let self-interest have some effect upon us.

When we are going to speak reproachfully of others, let us consider, whether we ourselves do not lie open, by some fault or other, to the same treatment.

There are very few so innocent and free, either from infirmities, or greater faults, as not to be liable hereto some way or other.

Even the wisest and best, and most perfect among men, have some little vanity or affectation

which lays them open to the raillery of the inimical or malicious.

There is perhaps no crime, except murder, that is of such real bad consequence as what we have been now treating of; nor is there any sin for which can be pleaded so little excuse. Other vices have something in view from which a self-gratification may be proposed: The ambitious man may expatiate on the charms of power, the libertine on the delights of sensuality, and the miser on the enjoyment of wealth; but the slanderer proposes no other pleasure to himself but that of seeing others wretched. It proceeds from a corrosive, self-tormenting turn of mind, incapable of being either happy itself, or suffering others to be so.

A good word is an easy obligation; but, not to speak ill, requires only our silence, which costs us nothing. It is a melancholy reflection to think there should be in mankind an uncharitable spirit, which finds greater pleasure in detecting faults than in commanding virtues.

Having thus spoken to the vice before us, I shall add a few words concerning those whose lot it is to be evil spoken of. It becomes such, with all others, so to behave as to give no occasion of scandal. Evil-speaking is an odious fault, but there is a fault far greater than this, and which more immediately concerns ourselves, (viz.) when we give a real occasion for this evil practice.

Evil-

Evil-speaking, it may be said, is a vice; and consequently no man ought to punish one vice by being guilty of another himself: It is true; and yet is as true that they deserve such usage, and no pity when they receive it.

The Providence of God permits bad men to punish and plague one another, although both are guilty in his sight.

Every Christian duty and good office should adorn us in this life; therefore, where persons fail hereof, their due consequences are to be expected.

But, if adorning it with every qualification, it should yet be traduced, they ought to bear it, and probably will, after a due vindication, with much patience, as a thing beneath their notice, and not to be diverted from their duty by any idle reflexions the silly world may make upon them; for, their censures are not in our power, and consequently should not be any part of our concern; at all times maintaining an inviolable perseverance in our duty; “that, whereas they speak evil of us, “as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed when “they shall behold our good works shining before “them; for, so is the will of God, that with “well-doing we put to silence the ignorance of “foolish men.”

We should never be concerned at what is spoken against us; for, if the accusations be true, we ought rather to correct ourselves, than restrain others;

others : if false, the contempt of such discourses will destroy the belief of them, but concern would argue their truth, and put it in the power of the vilest person to disturb our repose.

To conclude : If we must needs be censuring, let us turn our censures inwardly upon ourselves, where we shall find a large theatre of vice and folly, enough to declaim against, without going abroad in search of more.

Our zeal, our impartiality, our quickness of apprehension will here be well employed : Severity (I had almost said uncharitableness) will be commendable, when our own misconduct is the object of it. Charity will suppose several mitigating circumstances in the case of other delinquents, which cannot be supposed in our own ; because we judge of those criminal actions, whereof we ourselves have been guilty, by evidence and self-consciousness, and know how they have been in all respects circumstantiated ; but we see the conduct of other men only in exterior appearance, without knowing the secret motives of it ; and what we do not see or know to their disadvantage, we ought not in charity to presume.

If, upon an impartial review of his own past life, any of us should find himself "without sin, let him "cast the first stone : "

Let him be the foremost in attacking the reputation of his neighbour ; but I am persuaded our tender-

tenderness for other men will rise in proportion to our acquaintance with ourselves.

We shall have little leisure to judge our brother, and still less inclination to set him at nought, if we make a proper use of but this one consideration that “ we must all stand before the judgment-seat “ of Christ, that every one may give an account “ and receive the due reward of his own deeds.”

“ Put a bridle then on thy tongue, and set a “ guard before thy lips, lest the words of thine “ own mouth destroy thy peace.” Yea,

“ Fly the company of those who are given to “ detraction ; to hear them patiently is criminal, “ and to shew the least countenance of encourage- “ ment is to partake of their guilt, and to promote “ them to a continuance of it.

“ Whosoever speaketh of another’s failings with “ pleasure shall hear of his own with bitterness of “ heart.

“ Of much speaking cometh repentance ; but “ in silence is safety.

“ A talkative man is a nuisance to society ; the “ ear is sick of his babbling, the torrent of his “ words overwhelmeth conversation.

“ Boast not of thyself, for it shall bring contempt “ upon thee ; neither deride another, for it is dan- “ gerous.

“ A bitter

“ A bitter jest is the poison of friendship ; and
“ he that cannot restrain his tongue shall have
“ trouble.

“ Censure not thy neighbour then, and believe
“ not the tales of envy and malevolence, neither
“ repeat thou their slanders.

“ Defame him not in his character, neither bear
“ thou false witness against him.”

SERMON

SERMON XLIV.

Due Christian Conversation stated and enforced; in Opposition to Evil-speaking.

PHILIP. i. 27. “*Only let your Conversation be as
“becometh the Gospel of Christ:”*

IT would render a Discourse on these words too diffuse to treat of Christian Conversation in that large sense here intended by the Apostle, with regard to the duties of social life in general.

I shall therefore wholly apply myself to the consideration of it in a more confined sense, as, in discharge of the duties we owe to society, it respects the government of the tongue, whether in Mildness, Candour, or Christian Benevolence—And here, what I would in the lowest sense be thought to intend, is, such a manner of corresponding with others as thereby to give no reasonable cause of offence to any man, how remote soever it may appear.

Mildness,

Mildness, especially in conjunction with other social qualities, has great advantages, considered purely as an human virtue.

Nothing tends more to gain upon the affections of men, and open an access to their hearts: and by this means to gratify that invincible inclination which almost every man has of being beloved by others. But,

Human motives, in persons who have had any advantages of education, will go a great way towards regulating the tongue with regard to the duty which I am recommending; yet, however, we shall do well to strengthen those motives by arguments drawn from the genius and precepts of our holy religion.

Mildness and Humility, qualities inseparable, and above all others opposite to an arrogant and assuming air in conversation, are not to be considered merely as ornaments of civil life, but also as graces of the Christian.

No system of Philosophy ever explained the nature of these duties so well, or carried the notion of them so high, as the Gospel of Christ; much less was the practice of them ever recommended after so powerful and persuasive a manner as by the rules of it. But,

Notwithstanding the principles of Christianity are very clear on this head, yet, it may be questioned, whether there are not Christians who imagine,

Imagine, on the one hand, that as a haughty and commanding air of conversation is an argument of magnanimity, so, on the other hand, for a man to be always of a condescending and submissive temper is a sign that he really wants spirit.

I shall not take upon me here to shew particularly how unjustly both these prejudices are grounded, but content myself with observing, that great minds, as they are most cautious of giving provocation, are always most difficultly provoked; and that the calm and sedate have ever been reputed, and with great reason, as possessing the truest courage.

“ Who is a wise man then and endued with knowledge among you; let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness and wisdom.”

It is nevertheless but a low character of the duty before us, that it is gentle and inoffensive.

If we would carry it to its due height, we must exert it, according to its just import, in all generous offices, whenever proper occasions of doing them are presented.

“ A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and the evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, that which is evil; for, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

A good man then will make it the great end of his conversation to promote, as much as in him lies, the good and advantage of all men. But,

Because we can never give so clear and distinct notions of any duty by general maxims, as by reducing what we say to particular rules of life, I shall observe, the good and proper offices of the tongue, in conversation, as reducible to the four following rules; as being more particularly opposed to the practice of Evil-speaking, already discussed.

First, Of speaking well and advantageously of other people.

Secondly, Of judging candidly concerning their failings or escapes.

Thirdly, Of imparting to them useful and wholesome instructions.

Lastly, Of reproving them for their faults.

I do not say that all the good offices of conversation, as they respect the good and benefit of other men, are comprehended under these particulars; but yet, they are of such extent and influence, that, if we would be persuaded to the sincere practice of them, it would dispose us to a much greater facility of practising all the rest. And,

First, A good man will think himself concerned to speak well and advantageously of other people.

This is what a sense of humanity, and, on most occasions, of prudence and good manners, will oblige him to. But,

Christian

Christian charity lays upon us still superior and more invincible motives to an office so humane and becoming in itself.

How frequently does it happen that we have no way of being so useful or beneficial to those we love, as by embracing the proper occasions of speaking in their favour, or of convincing others who have taken up any unjust prejudices against them.

We may be rendered incapable, by the circumstances of life in which God has placed us, of giving other proofs of our charity and benevolence to mankind; but, this is an act of generosity which almost every man has frequent opportunities of performing; and which every good man will certainly think himself under an indispensable obligation, according as opportunity is given him, to perform. But,

Secondly, We are to judge candidly of the failings and escapes of other men.

Our blessed Saviour, who was the perfect pattern of this divine virtue, lays the utmost stress on this part of our duty, as even necessary to our eternal salvation: “ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.”

The Apostle makes it one principal character of charity, “ that it hopeth all things, and believeth all things;” (i. e.) all things wherein there is room for us to make candid and favourable allow-

ances: Supposing, for instance, there be any real foundation for what we hear another person charged or reproached with, charity will represent in his behalf, that nothing hath befallen him but what is common to man; that he hath the same passions with other men, or was, at the time of his being overcome, under more dangerous and violent circumstances of temptation. We think it reasonable, that the like alleviations should be admitted in excuse for our own follies and vices; and certainly we should think it equally reasonable to admit them in our judging and speaking of other men, were we to govern ourselves, not by the corrupt insinuations of self-love, but by the known maxims of Christian charity; nay, charity will suppose many mitigating circumstances in the case of other delinquents, which cannot be supposed in our own.

We judge of those criminal actions, whereof we ourselves have been guilty, by evidence and self-consciousness, and know how they have been in all respects circumstanced. But,

We see the conduct of other men only in exterior appearance, without knowing any of the secret motives of it. And,

What we do not see or know to their disadvantage, we ought not in charity to presume.

If we have been so happy as wholly to escape those snares which other persons have been observed

served to fall into, it will however be an excellent rule (considering the frailty of human nature), to restrain us from all uncharitable and rash censure of them, that we should “ consider ourselves, lest “ we also be tempted.”

Thirdly, It is a further character of good conversation, to impart good and wholesome instruction, and especially in what relates to the great duties and principles of religion.

Not that religious subjects are, at all times, and in all places, proper to be treated of in private conversation: Religion is a grave and serious thing, and ought not to mingle with every trifling and empty affair; it is holy, and therefore demands too great reverence to be introduced in common with vulgar and profane discourse. Yet,

This we may do, without exposing the honour and dignity of it: Whenever any error of ill consequence to faith or good manners is advanced in conversation, we may and ought to take the occasion of refuting it; or, where we find any ignorant person in a good and serious disposition to receive instruction, we should endeavour, by proper arguments, to “ bring him to the acknowledgment of the truth.” Besides,

There are seasons, and especially in the society of grave and prudent persons, wherein it may not only be convenient but highly requisite professedly to make some important article of religion, or

morality, the subject of discourse—And to this end are these commands in Scripture:

That we should “consider one another, to provoke to love and good works :”

“ That no man seek his own, but every one his brother’s good to edification.” And,

“ That as every one hath received the gift, even so we should minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” But,

Lastly, Where proper occasions offer, we are to admonish men in a friendly and decent manner of their faults.

There is perhaps no duty of religion which requires greater caution or prudence in the discharge of it than this of fraternal reproof: Indeed, the greatest abilities are required to qualify us for so nice and ungrateful an office, but which yet, on many occasions, becomes indispensably necessary. However, these hints may be of singular service hereto, (viz.) that we properly time our rebukes, when the sinner is cool and alone, and with that seriousness as may convince him, that what makes us so severe towards his sins, is purely for his sake, and out of mere charity to his soul.

I am fully aware of the general objection which mankind have to what is here advanced, (i. e.) “the fear of offending.” But,

We

We are not to plead difficulties in excuse for what the honour and interest of religion may require from us. And yet,

After all, there is not perhaps so great danger of giving offence, by a modest and seasonable reproof, as the backwardness of men to this duty is apt to heighten their apprehensions of.

Solomon (who certainly understood human nature very well, and formed the admirable rules he hath left us upon his knowledge of it) lays it down as a maxim, that “ he who rebuketh shall after-
“ wards find more favour than he that flattereth
“ with the tongue.”

Besides what hath been already delivered, we might here (whilst treating on conversation in general) enlarge the discourse in other respects also, and inveigh against all false and defiled communications whatever. But,

These will justly claim a place separately for themselves in their due adjustments.

I would only observe, by way of conclusion, that in exhorting to such “ a conversation as be-
“ cometh the Gospel of Christ,” whether in this or the before-mentioned respects, there is nothing but what is highly becoming with regard to all the duties and ornaments of human life. The design of Christianity is not to render men less agreeable in civil conversation, but to give it all the brightness

ness and improvements of which it is capable. What is required of us in our intercourse with one another, as Christians, is most conducive to the happiness of society, and the decorum which ought to be observed in it, if we consider ourselves merely as social creatures: So that, if the rules of conversation, which have been here prescribed and hinted at, were but duly observed, how lovely and desirable would all intercourse be in comparison of what it most frequently is!

Certainly, it would then be so refined, so resembling of Heaven, that no unclean thing in any respect could be permitted to enter into it; but “all things that either offend or hurt would be gathered out.”

“The benevolent man then openeth not his ear unto slander; the faults and failings of men give pain to his heart.

“His desire is to do good, and he searcheth out the occasions thereof.

“He enjoyeth the ease and tranquillity of his own breast, and rejoiceth in the good and happiness of his neighbour.

“From the largeness of his mind he comprehendeth in his wishes the happiness of all men; and from the generosity of his heart he endeavoureth to promote it.”

SERMON XLV.

Against Lying.

COLOS. iii. 9. “*Lie not one to another.*”

THE honour, the fame and reputation, the right and property of a man, are things of so exceeding consequence to him, that we find them every where most strenuously to endeavour by all means to defend it from all attacks and injuries whatever ; it cannot therefore but be a very great inducement to all men sincerely to embrace the precepts of religion, and a mighty comfort and consolation to them when they reflect how agreeable it is to the common maxims of the reasonable part of mankind.

Had God, after the first formation of all things, given us a law that should contradict the nature of our beings, there might then be some reasonable ground and pretence for the neglect of it ; but now that every precept of our religion, some way or other, tends to make us holy and happy, and secures to us, and to all men, what we value above

all

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S E R M O N X L V.

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all

all things, what can be said in our excuse if we violate so holy and indispensable a precept?

“Lie not one to another.”

Lying being that whereby we contract so much guilt to ourselves, and create evil to others, it is not without exceeding benignity that we are forbade it by the good Spirit of God; yea, and great ingenuity that we abstain from it ourselves.

In speaking therefore to it, I shall,

First, Shew what we are to understand thereby, and its several imports. And then,

Secondly, The reasons why we should abstain from it.

As to the nature of this sin, in general, it is the speaking what we know to be false, and has generally conjoined with it an intention to defraud; and, for the particular kinds of it, in some of them, they are most highly aggravated.

Lying is commonly of two sorts; the jesting or officious, and pernicious.

The first of these is not of so malign and evil a nature as the last: It is so small, in comparison with the other, that there have been patrons to defend it, as matter no way sinful, but harmless and lawful.

I must confess myself not of their opinion; I take truth to be of so sacred a nature, that it is not to be violated for the sake of a jest, or on account of any advantage to ourselves or others whatever.

Truth

Truth is one of the excellencies of God, and to conform to it is the excellency and perfection of man. Speech is one of the choicest gifts which God hath given us, to express our minds uprightly and sincerely: To use this noble faculty therefore contrary to the end and design of it, for any advantage or jest whatever, is grossly abusing the benignity of our Maker, and perverting his noble gifts.

We should use plainness and sincerity in all our words, and abhor falsehood and dissimulation, and those more refined ways of lying by equivocation, and secret reservations of our minds, on purpose to deceive.

Pernicious Lies being confessed by all to be most sinful, I shall speak more fully of them, and endeavour to illustrate their deformity.

By pernicious Lies we mean, as is generally understood, our speaking what is false, in order to defraud or do mischief to another.

This has a great aggravation of guilt, on account of the injustice which is involved in it, and bears proportion to the injury and wrong that is done thereby.

By this we may take away a man's life, which is murder, or his estate, which is robbery.

When therefore it hath such heinous crimes as these involved in it, it is, and must needs be, a sin of the first magnitude. But,

Perhaps,

Perhaps, we may seldom meet with Lying thus aggravated.

Most men are tender in these high points ; this sin therefore is most commonly pernicious with respect to a man's reputation and credit, which is but too lightly esteemed by many.

We meet with many complaints in the Old Testament of the want of truth and faithfulness among men ; and I am afraid there is as much reason for this complaint now, notwithstanding we live in an age of greater light, which reproves and makes manifest this work of darkness.

Few persons indeed have the effrontery to affirm what is directly false, what they know to be so, and may easily be detected in. But,

There are so many ways of misrepresenting facts, that men of fertile inventions may easily find means, on certain occasions, of imposing upon the credulity of others, without any extraordinary ill consequence to the prejudice of their reputation.

It is said, that artifices of disguising the truth are necessary to such as propose to live in the world. But,

They can have no prospect of succeeding in these designs, without putting on at least the appearance of integrity, and affecting a plain easy manner, and an open aspect.

Although in certain instances men may find their account more by practising the arts of a deep dissimu-

dissimulation, than by a plain and ingenuous freedom of speech, yet, we may safely affirm, that sincerity, generally speaking, is the most easy as well as ready and probable means of success.

With respect to a man's reputation (which in all his ways of commerce in the world is of so great consequence to him) sincerity must be allowed to have very much the advantage of dissimulation.

What we are principally to examine is not how far the arts of Lying or Collusion may be of use, either with regard to the interests or reputation of men, but whether we can reconcile them with the maxims of our holy religion. For,

If we profess ourselves Christians, we are then to govern our conduct by the laws of Christianity, and not by the practice of a corrupt world, even though the greatest names could be brought out of record, out of courts and kingdoms, in all ages, to support it.

I have mentioned nothing of the injustice done by promissory Lyes to those who are so credulous as to entertain hopes from them, nor of the common pretences which are made to excuse them; as,

That they are necessary to keep up the dependances of great men, &c.

I am not here considering the private motives upon which persons, in eminent stations, may sometimes be induced to act, but what is incumbent upon all good men, without distinction, at all times.

It may not be amiss to observe here, that it was great matter of joy and triumph to the primitive Christians (recorded for our example), that “with simplicity and godly sincerity, and not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God they had their conversation in the world,” and “spake as of sincerity, as of God, and in the sight of God;” than which there cannot be a more powerful consideration to those who believe a God to make them always speak the real sense of their mind.

The nature of Lying being thus explained, and its pretences obviated, we proceed,

Secondly, To the reasons dissuading therefrom.

As to jocular Lyes and officious, with those to whom a text of Scripture is of any weight, this may be sufficient to restrain them, that we are commanded to “use no manner of Lye, for the fashion thereof is not good.” It is not becoming Christians, who acknowledge a God of perfect truth, to border even upon the appearance of falsehood: Besides, those who allow themselves in these lesser matters, may easily be betrayed into the groffer act—And then,

As to pernicious Lyes, those, I mean, which are delivered with a real design to defraud, the reasons already alledged against this sin, from the danger and ill consequences of it, and its being a perversion of the noble faculty of speech; these,

one

one would think, are sufficient to deter all from committing it.

To Lye, in any respect, is directly opposite to the nature and being of God, whom to follow and imitate, "as dear children," is both our duty and happiness, who is "a God of truth," and loves and practises it in all his doings; "all false ways "He utterly abhors;" and therefore it is that we have so many express commands given us against this sin.

Under the Law it was enjoined, "ye shall not "deal falsely, nor Lye one to another. And,

Under the Gospel it is repeated, "Lye not one "to another;" "wherefore, putting away Lying, "speak every man truth with his neighbour."

So that nothing appears more distant from, or contrary to God, than Falsehood, whom we can neither resemble nor please without a most strict observance of truth. But further:

This inverts the order and end of speech, which is freely and fairly to communicate our minds to each other.

Setting this consideration aside (the evil of a Lye) let us only suppose that men might innocently converse together, without thinking themselves concerned to believe a word they say; what strange confusion and disorder must hence ensue!

And yet, this is what every insincere man, but

especially the Liar, contributes what he can to involve the world in.

Truth is so sacred a thing as not to be prostituted or trifled with on any account, it being the cement and safeguard of all society; and is therefore what ought to be inviolably observed in all our conversations and dealings with one another: That the tongue, which was given for the glory of God, and our mutual good, may not become the instrument of deceit and dishonour to both.

Again: There is no sin can be a surer sign of an unrenewed and unsanctified state than Lying; and therefore, in Scripture, this mark is put upon it, "the wicked go astray, speaking Lyes."

Whatever gross and notorious sins men may abstain from, or whatever fair pretences they may make of religion and goodness, "speaking Lyes" is, of itself, a sufficient proof that they are of the number of the wicked, and not the true children of God.

That we are of this most comfortable and honourable relation is, in a peculiar manner, known by abstaining from this abominable sin: "Surely " (saith God by his Prophet) they are my people, " children that will not Lye."

And Solomon to the same purpose: "A righteous man hateth Lying;" and again, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord."

As

As truth then entitles us to God, so Lying evinces men to be the children of the Devil, to whom all that practise Falsehood necessarily belong. The character of the Devil is, that “ he abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him: When he speaketh a Lye, it is of his own; for, he is a Lyar, and the father of Lyes.”

So that this sin is truly diabolical: And St. Peter therefore spoke with great propriety when he said to Annanias, “ Why hath Satan filled thine heart to Lye?—as if perceiving his contrivance in the very performance.

And Oh! that men would seriously consider this, that when they frame a Lye to the hurt of their Christian brethren, they are doing the work of “ the great accuser of mankind;” or, thereby to over-reach and defraud, are then complying with the suggestions of the “ wicked one; who still works in the children of disobedience;” and are doing that which renders them the children of the Devil.

How carefully then, to speak with all sincerity, ought we to be to avoid those things which subject us to so vile a relation! But further:

It is a sin that God seldom fails to detect, confound, and punish. Yea,

Not only God, but even men also (especially those who have been in any way hurt hereby) will think themselves sufficiently authorised to vindicate

dicate themselves by convincing all gainsayers of the truth, and to retaliate the provocation, either by finding or making faults, whereby to blacken them in return; not only their care being engaged, their industry quickened, and their invention whetted hereby to observe or devise matter of recrimination, but also their judgment bribed to think it not only lawful, but even needful in their own defence to disparage the Lyar, that his report may have the less weight to their prejudice.

Thus is this sin of pernicious consequence to the sinner himself, even in the natural tendency of things.

This is not all; God himself, as I have observed, will be an express avenger of it.

He hath such a peculiar care over innocence as scarcely ever to abandon it, so as finally to suffer by any Falsehood.

“ The good man’s righteousness (the Psalmist observes) God will bring forth as the light, and His judgment as the noon-day.”

Whereas the detractor’s memory He suffers either to fail, or their reports so to interfere, as thereby even to confound themselves.

“ Lying lips are but for a moment.”

It is difficult to manage: The path of truth is plain and safe, but that of Falsehood is a perplexing maze.

After

After the first departure from sincerity, it is not in the power of the Lyar to stop ; one artifice unavoidably leads on to another, till, as the intricacy of the labyrinth increases, he is left entangled in his own snare.

Deceit discovers a little mind, which stops at temporary expedients, without rising to comprehensive views of conduct ; it betrays a dastardly spirit, and is the resource of one who wants courage to avow his designs. Youth should particularly guard against this vice. That darkness of character, where we can see no heart ; those foldings of art, through which no native affection is allowed to penetrate, present an object unamiable in every season of life, but particularly odious in youth. If at an age when the heart is warm, when the emotions are strong, and when nature is expected to shew itself free and open, they can already smile and deceive, what are we not to look for when they shall be longer hackneyed in the ways of men ; when interest shall have compleated the obduration of their hearts, and experience shall have improved them in all the arts of guile !

Diffimulation in youth is the forerunner of perfidy in age ; its first appearance is the fatal omen of growing depravity and future shame. It obscures the lustre of every accomplishment, and sinks men into contempt both with God and man.

For,

For, being once known to be addicted hereto, men will not believe them, even when they speak the truth; and then they will be fit neither for counsel, nor friendship; neither for service, nor command; for office, nor honour; but, like salt that hath lost its savour, “will be fit only for the dunghill, to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men, and perish for ever.” Yea,

God oftentimes makes it, as it is the occasion of much evil to others, to be also of great calamity to the person guilty of it; all kinds of Lyars commonly living to be convinced of their folly by their sorrow, being ever in fear before discovery, and always in disgrace and grief after it, according to that true observation of Solomon; “A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he that speaketh Lyes shall surely smart for it.”

But,

However such may happen to escape at present, yet God will assuredly chastise them for it hereafter; for the God of truth can never be supposed to preserve to Himself any who have addicted themselves to that perfidious Falsehood which He abominates.

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord” (saith the Psalmist)?—to which the reply is, “he that worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth from his heart.” Again:

“All

“ All Lyars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” So that the worst of punishment with the vilest of sins will be the reward of the sin before us in the next life, however it may escape in this.

“ Lye not then one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” Yea,

“ Putting away Lying, speak the truth every man with his neighbour.”

SERMON XLVI.

Truth enforced; the Opposite of Lying and Falsehood.

EPHES. iv. 25. “*Speak every Man Truth with his Neighbour.*”

SPEECH is a prerogative peculiar to mankind, and fitted for the benefit and comfort of a creature formed for society.

By this we transmit to others, with great ease, freedom, and exactness, the thoughts of our hearts, and become capable of diffusing the riches of that knowledge, as it were, in a moment, the gathering whereof may have cost us the pains and study perhaps of many years. And,

To such purposes, no doubt, it was, that the giver of this faculty designed it should be employed.

Hence it is that we are so frequently commanded in Scripture to the due use and right employ of it, and not to abuse, in the ways of deceit and irreligion, what was given and designed us to be employed

employed in the use of edifying, in sincerity and truth.

The Apostle, in the three first chapters of this Epistle, speaks of our election, adoption, and many other matters of faith.

In those days, as often as men heard of faith they apprehended it to be an assent of the mind to some truth, separate from obedience and a good life, the Apostle therefore takes particular care to put them in mind, that their faith ought to be practical, and adorned with all manner of virtue.

To this end the fourth chapter begins with an exhortation to an holy life, “worthy of that vocation wherewith we are called.” And,

Having all along exhorted to several virtues, and dissuaded us from several particular sins, in the verse before us he enforces a doctrine, a virtue but of too little observation among us, from a consideration of the malignity of its opposite vice: “Wherefore (says he) putting away lying, speak “every man Truth with his neighbour;” for, “we are members one of another.”

In speaking further to which words, I shall,

First, Explain the duty before us, and the obligation we are under to practise the same. And then,

Secondly, The several reasons, as alledged by the Apostle, more strongly to engage us therein.

As to the import of the phrase, I shall speak to its full acceptation.

The

The subject matter contained in it is Truth, of which all men are to be observers, and that to all men : “ Speak every man Truth with his neighbour.”

First, Of speaking Truth.

As to Truth, it may be briefly defined in this, (viz.) that it is a virtue through which we are inclined to speak no otherwise with our tongue than we think in our heart ; it is of a large and comprehensive nature, and denotes all that plainness and integrity, all that simplicity and honesty, which ought to be practised by all good Christians, upon all occasions.

The Gospel law doth not only command us to the observance of Truth in the more open and known actions of men, where falsehood must ever be detected in the first onset, but also in the more secret and hidden causes of things, and such as God only and ourselves do really know.

Whatever the common practice of the world in this case may be, yet, the Christian law allows no liberty for falsehood in the least matter, but strictly requires “ Truth in the inward parts,” (i. e.) in the most hidden and reserved things of men. “ Thou shalt by no means with a Lye, in any matter, circumvent thy brother ; but that which is altogether right shalt thou speak : I am the Lord : ” But further :

Sincerity

Sincerity doth not only consist in speaking the Truth without artifice or disguise, but also in the being faithful to the outward professions of kindness and respect which we make to other men, and in satisfying them that our words speak the real language of our hearts ; “as of sincerity, as “of God, and in the sight of God ;” than which there cannot be a more powerful consideration to those who believe a God, to make them always speak the real sense of their minds.

A man of candor, by any outward signification of what he intends in favour of another, will no more mislead him into a false expectation, than a man of veracity will impose upon any person by a downright falsehood.

The definition of Truth, thus given, may be of good use in general conversation, whereby to excite men to all possible probity, integrity, candor, and plain-dealing ; that commerce might flourish in our land, by engaging men to rely upon, and trust to, the sincerity, uprightness, and honesty of one another.

The precepts of Scripture are very express to this purpose ; they require sincerity and truth, without any impure or foreign mixture ; they require that “we should be sincere, and without “offence ;” and that, “putting away Lying,” we should, as in my text, “speak the Truth every “man with his neighbour.”

Not that I would hereby insinuate, or will it follow from hence, that a man is obliged to be so very open and communicative as to let all persons, without reserve, into all his designs.

The wisest of men would appear to act in many cases very weakly, were they to form their conduct by such a rule. And indeed,

It would be a great reproach upon Christianity, to suppose the maxims of it inconsistent with common prudence. Our blessed Saviour, by qualifying the simplicity of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent, hath plainly instructed us, that candor is not only very reconcileable with caution, but ought never to be separated from it.

A man then is not obliged to speak all truths that may do hurt; extraordinary cases, in particular instances, fully justifying an obstinate silence, although at no time, through favour or advantage, to screen them with a Lye. But further:

“ Speak every man Truth.”

Though Truth is a virtue, so expressly enjoined in Scripture, and, in a peculiar manner, agreeable to the nature and genius of our holy religion, yet (and sorry I am to say it), it is a duty far from being so generally practised as might be expected in Christian conversation and dealings among men.

There are some, who, from their occupation and manner of life, pretend that Truth is not absolutely required in their calling; and that a strict adherence

adherence to it would put them beyond the means and limits of a profitable science ; but, such excuses must not only add shame, but iniquity to their practice. For,

If a strict adherence to Truth be the honour and glory of a man, falsity must be his greatest debasement, and consequently argue, that such professions and practices are rather to be avoided than continued in.

The Apostle is exceedingly strict in this case, “ Let no man (says he) go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter, for, the Lord is the avenger of all such ; ” and in my text, “ Speak every man Truth with his neighbour.”

Of all things therefore take care not to falsify the Truth, either from weakness, or any worldly motive. There is no capitulating with the law of God ; it has the same force at all times, and is actuated by one unvaried spirit.

Truth then is to be not only generally but universally observed towards all men : “ Speak every man Truth with his neighbour.”

There are many in the world who make it a matter of glory, and by no means think it a breach of religion, to circumvent by falsehood and treachery, by whatever means, people who are distant and unknown to them, and who are of different principle or profession from themselves.

If there be any reality in religion, it must be good, and that towards all men; and to be defective in it, especially in its most material part and characteristic, must argue great imperfection in us. But,

That Truth which is expressed in the text to be spoke to our neighbour comprehends all mankind, and is to be expressed to them as occasion shall so order it, which is evident from the wise solution of our blessed Saviour to that question of the self-justifying Lawyer, “and who is my “neighbour?” Where we find a Samaritan dealing out good offices plentifully to a Jew, who neither had nor would have any dealings with him.

So that no distance of country, or difference of profession, can justify us in the least untruth; but “we must speak every man Truth with his neighbour,” (i. e.) towards all men.

As to the reasons persuading to the observance of Truth, they are powerful and strong.

The Apostle here gives two, the one preceding, the other subsequent to my text.

In the first he exhorts us to “put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

We should “speak Truth every man with his neighbour,” because we cannot, without this, be like unto God. As God is true in all the decla-

declarations of his mind, with respect to us, we cannot therefore be like Him, nor “ be created “ in righteousness after His image,” unless there be the same Truth in us, and in all our words.

A second reason proposed by the Apostle, for the due observation of the precept before us, is, “ be-“ cause we are members one of another.”

The force of which argument lies in this, (viz.) that as the members of an human body are united by certain laws of communication, and have the same common interests, so, whether we consider ourselves under a civil or religious distinction, as members of society, we are severally, in our different capacities, obliged to promote the common good and happiness of it, which we can no otherwise do than by avoiding all insincerity whatever that has a direct tendency to destroy the natural order and fundamental rights of all men: Every member of society, from the very end for which God hath given speech to mankind, having a just and inalienable right to demand it of all men.

The design of speech is to communicate our thoughts fairly and freely, to our mutual profit; and not to disguise, and so, by deceiving, hurt one another.

“ Lye not then one to another, seeing that ye have put off the Old Man with his deeds,” (Satan, “ who is a Lyar, and the Father of Lyes,”). “ and have put on the New Man, which is renewed

“ in knowledge, after the image of God that created thee :” (i. e.) Because we profess to be conformed to the image of God, we should therefore more particularly charge ourselves with all Truth and Faithfulness ; for, “ we are members one of another.”

Truth is the basis of every virtue : Let us then, as we value the approbation of Heaven, or the esteem of the world, cultivate the love of Truth.

In all our proceedings, let us be direct and consistent. Ingenuity and candor possess the most powerful charm ; they bespeak universal favour, and carry an apology for almost every failing. “ The lip of Truth shall be established for ever ; but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”

“ Lord ! who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, or who shall rest upon thy holy hill ?—even he that walketh uprightly, and doth the thing that is right, and speaketh the Truth from his heart.

To conclude : Whoever can dispense with himself, as to moral duties, (and which therefore because they are moral, are of indispensable obligation) and makes no scruple of a lye, nor conscience of Truth, what badge soever he may wear, or whatever title he may call himself by, it is as impossible that such an one can be a true Christian as it is to reconcile the “ God of Truth” and the “ Father of lies ;” “ his religion then is vain, and the Truth is not in him.”

It

It becomes us therefore who worship the God of Truth in all things to be strict observers of it. Wherefore “buy the Truth and sell it not, also “wisdom and instruction, with every perfect gift;” for, “where Truth is, it maketh not ashamed,” but “we shall have boldness and confidence not “only before all men,” but also, at the last day, “before the great God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, “our Judge himself, the great Bishop and Shepherd of our souls.”

SERMON XLVII.

Proper Oaths, their Lawfulness.

MATT. v. 34. “*Swear not at all.*”

THERE is unquestionably at first sight a strong appearance that all Oaths, without exception, are forbidden: and it is no wonder that many have been carried away by that appearance, and held it unlawful to swear upon any occasion. But,

Whoever will examine the matter thoroughly can hardly fail, I think, to be fully satisfied of the contrary.

That an Oath is not unlawful in its own nature needs very little proof; it having been used by the best men, on solemn occasions, in all ages of the world. For,

It is acknowledging the being and omniscience of God, that we are in his presence, and that He is a witness of what we say, and an avenger of all falsehood.

Now,

Now, these are truths all of them highly honourable to God, and cannot therefore be sinful in man, being an act of piety and worship towards our Maker. And,

Besides this, they are highly useful. Men are so exceedingly prone both to conceal truth, and to speak untruths, that they have need of the most powerful restraints to keep them from it; and these to be enforced in the most affecting manner on their consciences. Swearing then is, in its own nature, a very religious act, and as such is enjoined in various places of holy Writ.

It must be owned, great numbers will certainly speak truth without an Oath, and too many will not speak it with one. But,

The generality of mankind are of the middle sort, neither so virtuous as to be safely trusted, in cases of importance, on their bare word, nor yet so abandoned as to violate a more solemn engagement. Accordingly we find, by experience, that many will boldly say what they will by no means venture to swear.

This therefore shews the necessity of insisting upon the strongest security; and the advantage thereof is, that when we have it thus given us we are naturally disposed to acquiesce in the matter; and “an Oath for confirmation becomes the end “of all strife.”

This

This practice is of so great consequence to human society, that it could scarce be kept in order without it: Possibly indeed a small community may by strict discipline subsist, for some time, wholly without it; yea, and perhaps a small sect, in the midst of a larger community, may under due limitations be safely excused from it also, whilst they continue sufficiently distinguished from the rest of the world, and whilst the value which they set on this indulgence makes them fearful of doing any thing to forfeit it. But,

Were such a permission to become general, throughout nations and kingdoms, and all men were released at once from what they looked on as their strongest obligation to truth, it is easy to guess what universal confusion would inevitably follow.

All ages and nations of the world have been sensible of this; and have therefore required the most highly esteemed of their subjects, on every fit occasion, to confirm their testimony by an appeal to God.

Not only amongst the Heathens, but amongst the holy Patriarchs also, from early times, good men have asked, and equally good men have given, the security of an Oath. Yea,

God himself is represented in Scripture, as swearing to men;

“ The

“ The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent ;”
“ I have sworn by my holiness that I will not fail
“ David.” Again :

“ I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this
“ house shall become a desolation.” And,

Upon Abraham’s offering up his son Isaac, “ By
“ myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because
“ thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld
“ thy son, thine only son from me, that in blessing
“ I will bless thee.”

From whence the Apostle observes, that “ when
“ God made a promise to Abraham, because He
“ could swear by no greater, He sware by himself :
“ Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew
“ unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of
“ his counsel, confirmed it by an Oath ;” and if
He sware, who cannot sin, we may be confident it
is no sin to swear. Moreover,

As God himself is pleased sometimes to swear
by himself, so He hath not only permitted, but
commanded us to swear by his name :

“ Thou shalt fear the Lord, thy God, and serve
“ him, and shalt swear by his name.” And again :

“ Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and him
“ shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave,
“ and swear by his name ;” from whence it ap-
pears, that he hath made this a part of that wor-
ship and honour which we ought to pay him ; and
that it is as much our duty, upon occasion, to
swear

swear by his name, as it is to fear and serve him; and in those very commandments wherein He requires us "not to take his name in vain, nor "swear by his name falsely," He plainly intimates, that we may and ought to swear truly by it.

God tempts no man to sin, but directs us to that which is right and lawful before him, and therefore having directed us by his Prophet how to swear, (viz.) "in justice, in judgment, and "righteousness," hath hereby given us an undeniable argument that we may lawfully do it, provided we do but observe his directions therein.

Hence it is said, that "every one who thus "sweareth shall be commended, but the mouth of "them that speak lies," or swear falsely, "shall "be stopped." And,

"He that swearth to his neighbour, and dis- "appointeth him not," is reckoned among those "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and "dwell in the tabernacle of the Most High." Yea,

God challenges this peculiarly to Himself: "How can I pardon thee for this?—thy children "have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are "no Gods." Where He plainly makes the swearing by any other but Himself to be down-right forsaking him, because thereby men give that honour unto others which is due only to the true God.

From

From whence it appears, that it is so far from being unlawful, that it is a necessary duty to swear by the true God, and by him only.

Accordingly we find the holy Angels themselves swearing by Him : “ And the Angel (saith St. John) which I saw stand upon the sea, and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to Heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever.”

Also Dan. xii. 7. And,

As for the saints in the Old Testament, there is nothing more frequently recorded of them than their administering and taking of Oaths :—

“ Abraham made his steward swear by the Lord, the God of Heaven, and the God of Earth ;” but, such examples are so frequent that I need not mention them. Yea,

Men are not only introduced as swearing to God, but are, under the law of Moses, expressly commanded to “ swear by his name” to one another ; and Judges and Magistrates are required to administer Oaths in doubtful cases. If there be a controversy between two, “ the Oath of the Lord shall be between them,” and by that the Judges shall determine the cause ; and, in the case of jealousy, “ the Priest shall charge the woman with an Oath.”

Thus Abimelech made Abraham swear to be true to him ; and Abraham, his Servant, respecting a wife for his son Isaac ; and Jacob, Joseph,

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concerning his burial; and many more: All which plainly shews, that the saints of God, in those days, made no scruple at all of giving or taking Oaths, but looked upon it as their duty, in all proper cases to do it.

Nor do the Prophets, though they sometimes improve upon the Law, ever make mention of Oaths, but with honour, provided men swear as Jeremiah directs, “in truth, in judgment, and “righteousness.” And,

Far from intimating that under the Messiah this act of religion would become unlawful, they foretell, in passages which must be interpreted of the Gospel-times, that then “unto God every knee “shall bow, and every tongue shall swear by his “name.” But,

As all things are liable to abuse, and few things in religion have escaped it, great abuses in the matter of Oaths prevailed also amongst the Jews before our Saviour’s days, and which He hath fully and wisely refuted in the 23d chapter of St. Matthew.

Considering then the advantages of Oaths, and the Jewish perversion of them, which is most likely to suppose that our blessed Lord intended to forbid, the total use, or the abuse only?

Is it credible in the least, that He “whose king-“dom is not of this world” should mean to destroy the

the surest means of the security thereof, and which they had enjoyed from the beginning?

Certainly this was not his intention, if his words can possibly signify any thing else, which they naturally do..

It is true indeed the prohibition is, at first view, absolute and general; but so are many others in Scripture, which yet have their limitations in the nature of things. The very next prohibition, following my text, is just as general: “I say unto you that ye resist not evil;” yet, in some cases, we all do, and ought to resist it. Another, in the next chapter, is, “Take no thought for the morrow;” and a third immediately follows, “Judge not that ye be not judged.”

Here we must understand our Saviour to speak only of needless thought, and rash judgment.

And why then should we not understand him to speak here also of needless and rash swearing, and apprehend, that He chose such comprehensive terms on all these subjects because there was much occasion to warn men strongly, and in comparison, but little danger of their failing to make proper exceptions.

What our Saviour condemns, the words immediately following; joined with it, as they ought to be, plainly declare. “Swear not at all, but let your communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay.”

Communication here, and elsewhere, means discourse in general; Oaths, therefore, in common talk, is what our blessed Lord here forbids, and not that bond of security which all nations revere.

A further confirmation of this, if there need one, follows it, in which he adds, "For what soever is more than these cometh of evil."

It proceeds from the Evil-one, and consequently from an evil mind; it produces an evil custom; it is of an evil example, and tends to an evil end.

Common swearing indeed can come only of evil; but, taking a solemn Oath, on affairs of moment, may come, and often doth, from a reverence of our Maker, and from a desire of maintaining peace and justice among men; all which are the occasions of great good.

Our Saviour's words then sufficiently interpret themselves.

It is very material to observe further, that the more serious and strict of the Jewish Teachers themselves forbade swearing in the same general terms with our Saviour, though, at the same time, according to their Law, they exacted Oaths in matters of importance.

In short therefore their words, and our Saviour's, were meant and taken in exactly the same manner as ours are at present, when we at any time command those under us never to swear. But,

We

We have still further evidence that some Oaths remained after our Saviour's prohibition, as lawful as before.

He Himself, our faultless pattern, made use of them; when being adjured by the High Priest (which was the form of Oaths among the Jews*) He answered in direct terms thereto, and many other such like things did He. So that, unless we will interpret our Saviour's doctrine contrary to his own practice, we cannot understand him as forbidding all Oaths in general, and when truly required. But,

Lest any one should alledge (though without a shadow of reason) that our Saviour might exempt himself from what He bound his disciples to, observe we further,

That one of the most eminent of them, St. Paul, hath, in several of his Epistles, made use of one term or other of swearing on occasions which he saw were proper: As, "God is my witness;" "I call God for a record upon my soul;" "These things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lye not."

To all which I shall only add, that the same Apostle expressly saith, "Men verily swear by the greater, and an Oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." Where he doth not only approve of taking Oaths, or swearing, upon

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* See Leviticus v. 1.

lawful occasions, but acquaints us also with the great end and necessary use of it; even “to put an end to all strife;” this being the greatest remedy that ever was, or can be found out for the determining of controversies. For,

By swearing we call the Omniscient and Most High to vouch the truth of what we say, and if false to punish us accordingly. Now,

Is it possible, that so great an Apostle should understand so little, or observe so ill, the rules of that Gospel which he had received from Christ himself by revelation, and was authorised, by extraordinary commission of Apostleship, to teach, as both to do himself, and oblige others to do, what Christ had forbidden, and even be guilty of it in those very writings which make a part of God’s word? Or,

Is not his practice in these circumstances an abundantly sufficient commentary on our Saviour’s doctrine?

What the practice of Christians in the two succeeding ages was, is neither so material, nor certain. If they were seldom willing to swear before Heathen Magistrates, most probably it was because then they must have sworn by Heathen Gods. But,

As soon as ever Christianity was established, Magistrates required this security, and subjects gave it, as freely as among the Jews before,

All these considerations unite in shewing, that the words of our Saviour relate only to swearing without necessity in our common communication.

Indeed, were there much less to favour this limitation; yet, while the state of the world continues such as it is—if questions of importance arise; as they often do, which cannot be decided as they ought without our testimony, and the which will not be accepted except upon Oath, what is here to be done?

Shall we stand by and see falsehood and oppression triumph, and the lives and fortunes of men unjustly depressed, rather than do what is confessedly lawful to prevent it?

Ought we not, in such a case, to follow the direction “I will have mercy and not sacrifice;” thereby preferring the moral and unchangeable duty of supporting truth and right before the positive and mutable one (if any such there were) of abstaining from an Oath.

As to Oaths not imposed by the Magistrate, their case is very different, and we ought to be extremely cautious about them.

Our Saviour's prohibition, it is true, is only of swearing in common discourse; and what we deliberately assert on occurrences of more than ordinary moment is of a nature very superior to common discourse; for which reason, and especially since our Saviour and his Apostles did on such

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such occasions make use of such asseverations, it is not always unlawful for us so to do. But,

It is much more expedient and prudent resolutely to avoid them, whenever we possibly can, and most men may avoid them entirely. It happens exceedingly seldom, and to very few of us, that our sincerity cannot be evidenced, if we will, by other methods than by that of Oaths, and which will appear abundantly more worthy of credit, without the awful solemnity of an appeal to God, which ought to be sacredly reserved for emergencies of uncommon necessity. Upon the whole :

To swear by the name of God, upon just and weighty occasions, with reverence and in truth, is so far from being a crime, when we are called to it by lawful authority, that we should very often offend, both against justice and charity, if we should refuse it. And,

It is in vain to alledge, to the contrary, a zeal and tenderness for the honour of God's name, since God hath so far approved of it, that He hath sometimes used it himself, and we have the example of his more peculiar favourites to justify the practice of it ; and holy David speaks of it not only as a thing in itself lawful but altogether commendable : " All they that swear by Him shall be commended." 20

The free court of justice is owing, in a great measure, to the obligation of those Oaths with which

which Princes and Magistrates bind themselves to a diligent and impartial administration of it ; hence it is that the fatherless and widows are defended in their just rights against those who would otherwise defraud and oppress them—the violence of wicked men is by this means restrained, their villainies detected, and themselves brought to condign punishment ; and were there no other argument therefore for the lawfulness of Oaths, yet, considering how happy an instrument they are of the greatest benefits to mankind, how necessary for the support of justice, and the preservation of peace and good order in societies, we can hardly suppose but that they are allowed by God, and were indeed of His own ordering and appointment “from whom every good thing cometh ;” being at the same time the most certain pledges, as well as the utmost assurances, which we can possibly give of our faith and sincerity ; and are therefore both the sinews of Government, and most sacred bonds of society.

Thus have I endeavoured to lay before you how far Oaths are lawful ; and the subject is material enough to be thus enlarged on, were it only for the three following reasons, (viz.)

That Christianity may not lie under the imputation (for a heavy one it would be) of censuring as criminal what the welfare of society makes indispensable :

That

That the whole body of its professors may not be accused of authorising the transgressions of one of its fundamental precepts. And,

That none of us in particular, if at any time called upon to give our testimony in a legal manner, may do it with a doubtful conscience ; for, “ whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

There is yet one more and a very serious use to be made of the doctrine before us, (viz.)

That if the bond of an Oath, on fit occasions, be of such importance to society, and since an awful regard to God is what gives to all Oaths their whole force and efficacy, that regard should be cultivated with the utmost care..

When the dread of an Almighty Avenger is taken away, the most sacred of obligations will become no better than a more effectual means of committing injustice.

Let us therefore diligently preserve the reverence of God strong upon our hearts and those around us ; for, “ the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that do thereafter : The praise of “ it endureth for ever.”

S E R M O N X L V I I I .

Against Common-Swearing.

MATT. V. 34. *"Swear not at all."*

THESE words, as they cannot (agreeable to the context and reason of the thing) be interpreted as forbidding the use of oaths on just occasions, and weighty matters, when properly called on, are yet the strongest asseveration possible against them in common conversation and familiar discourse among men.

In speaking therefore to them, I shall,

First, Shew that God hath absolutely forbidden the light and common use of them.

Secondly, That there are many and strong reasons why he should.

Thirdly, That no plea of any weight can be made in favour of them ; and therefore,

Lastly, That all men might easily abstain from them.

Were

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Were all men disposed as they ought to be, one would think it should be enough of itself that our Maker hath absolutely forbidden the unnecessary use of his name.

The third commandment, delivered by the mouth of God himself from Mount Sinai, is quite plain to this purpose ; and by the words before us, which are so exceedingly strong against needless oaths, that rather than not condemn them effectually, our Saviour hath chosen to speak as if He condemned all oaths in general ; it is yet further confirmed, and continues to be of the same force and weight as when first delivered with such awful solemnity, “ with thunder and lightning, “ with smoke and exceeding trembling.”

Precepts, delivered in such a manner, we may be assured, God will expect us to obey with more than ordinary care.

As for imprecations, no precept in the world was ever more express than that of the Apostle against them, “ Bless, and curse not.”

What shall we say then ?—Do we allow that God hath a right to rule us or not ?—We cannot say that this sort of language is a duty, but, on the contrary, it is sin.

Suppose we could perceive no kind of harm in the practice, yet, doth not God know better. And,

Is it no harm to do what He hath expressly forbidden ?

Suppose

Suppose He intends it only for the tryal and exercise of our obedience, is that a reason why we should disobey? Do we bear this treatment from our inferiors; and can it then be fit treatment of the Father and Lord of all?

Surely, when once his will is declared, that alone should be sufficient to regulate our behaviour.

However, that we may see this obligation in a yet fuller light, and that religion may suffer no imputation of imposing arbitrary commands upon us, I shall proceed,

Secondly, To shew, that there are great and powerful reasons for the precept before us.

God is a being to whom the very highest of his creatures owe all possible regard and honour; and certainly our low condition, and many sins, ought not to lessen, but increase it.

“ The Lord, our God, is a jealous God:” He cannot therefore suffer his “ holy and reverend “ name” to be intermixed with all the trifles and follies of our common talk; but hath commanded us to pray that it may be sanctified and “ hallowed.”

Should He permit it; piety and virtue would be lost from off the earth; for, if men make free, in this manner, with the most sacred of all things, what possibility is there that any real sense of duty should remain amongst them?

It cannot be but we shall hereby be exposed to the most atrocious of sins. For,

“ In a multitude of words (the wise man observes) there wanteth not sin ;” and in a multitude of oaths there wanteth not falsity.

As the boldest Swearers are generally the freest talkers, and call Heaven to witness the most plentifully, they cannot avoid being guilty of false oaths perpetually,

Perhaps he will plead, that he was not in earnest ; but, are oaths to be made matter of jest ? — are invocations of God, solemn vows and imprecations, things for men to cast wantonly around them, and say, “ they are but in sport ? ”

Remember, He, with whom we take these liberties, hath made no allowance for them in his word, nor consequently will make any at the great day of accounts. The rule of his law is express : “ Ye shall not swear by my name falsely ; neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God ; I am the Lord,” the avenger of all such, and who will by “ no means hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. And,

We have no kind of intimation that this command is to give way as often as we think it proper to divert ourselves with transgressing it. But further :

Besides all that hath been already said, it contradicts the very design and spirit of religion, which is a spirit of mildness and benevolence, of courtesy and affability to all ; which surely Cursing and Swearing are not. For,

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To our superiors, they are affronts and indignities—to our equals, they are rudeness; and, it is a mean-spirited insolence to shew our contempt of those beneath us, by them, for no other reason, than because we know they must bear it. Then,

Besides this, it is a crime of public scandal and bad example, and is the occasion of the increase of wickedness; and, consequently, towards bringing down the judgments of God upon us.

These things being considered, there may seem to be little need of saying any thing further of this sin. But,

As too many are apt to think that whatever objections there may be against it, there are likewise considerable pleas to be made in its favour: I shall therefore speak briefly to them. And,

First, It is said, that oaths give credit to what we say, and look like a kind of importance and ornament to our discourse:

Whereas, so far are they to the contrary, that they greatly weaken it, as arguing in a man a perpetual distrust of his own reputation; and, instead of adorning his discourse, it hereby becomes too bold for people of gentle and rational breeding.

Too much asseveration gives ground of suspicion. Truth and honesty have no need of loud protestations. Yea,

By making oaths common in every case we lose the advantage of them in cases extraordinary;

and we are neither better respected or trusted for them, but, contrarywise, both our word and qualifications are held in cheap and vile account.

It is no excuse, that men many times do it ignorantly; for, certainly, it by no means lessens the fault that a man hath got the habit of it so perfectly that he knows not when he commits it, but rather argues how great and old a sinner he is in this way; and therefore that it is high time for him to break off these sins by repentance and amendment:

Especially as this sin, of all others, has the least of temptation to it. Profit or pleasure there is none in it; yea, it is wholly unprofitable, and of tasteless account; nor by nature are we inclined thereto: A man may be naturally prone to anger or lust, but surely no man was ever born of a Swearing constitution.

If a man, who being provoked to anger, discharges his passion (as but too many are apt to do) in profane Oaths, and still more execrable Curses and Imprecations, shall say, that the provocations he received were such as forced him to it, and that he was so urged that he could not forbear, let him, before he accounts this a reasonable excuse, find some connexion between being angry at a man, and blaspheming God; or, make it appear by what kind of operation the vain and unlawful use of God's name, whether in Oaths or Imprecations,

cations, gives ease to his disorder, or restores things to rights again.

All that can be pretended for it is custom; but to shew that this is no excuse, it is very observable, that it is particularly in the matter of this sin that the Holy Ghost gives the caution, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.”

Lastly, It deserves to be considered, that this sin is so much the greater, because of the frequent returns of it in those who are accustomed to it: So that, although it were but small in itself at first, (as God knows it really is not) yet, the frequent practice and repetition of it, in a very short time, will amount to a prodigious height.

To conclude: It is really piercing to hear the multitude of profane Oaths that proceed out of the mouths of many, without any sense of the evil they do, or fear of any thing they must suffer for so doing. The Prophet tells us, that “because of Swearing the land mourneth;” and undoubtedly many there are who are afflicted and distressed hereby, who little think from whence the curse and secret canker came. And,

How should it be otherwise?—will God (suppose ye) bless those who daily curse him and “take his most holy name in vain;” who defy his laws, and call for vengeance on themselves and others almost every word they say?—can they expect a blessing who scarce ever mention God but in the

way of Cursing, and make few other prayers than for plagues and mischiefs, damnation, and eternal wrath?

How merciful is God that He doth not grant them what they so passionately ask him!

Should God, in justice, fulfill their petitions (as well He may, and the sinner hath but too much reason to expect) the very thoughts of its consequence must make one tremble!

Let such therefore as are accustomed to this sin be assured, that, without sincere repentance and amendment, however God may deal with them in this world, He will most certainly (according to their own Curses and repeated wishes) condemn and confound them in the world to come.

There is no answering any of these arguments; no one pretends to justify the practice hereof from scripture, or reason, or the authority of wise and good men.

Is it not therefore truly strange, that what is so impossible to be excused or justified should yet so generally prevail?—that that which every one condemns in himself and others should yet be suffered to reign, as it were, without controul?

Ought not such persons to be made more sensible of their duty, and to pay more honour to their constant heavenly benefactor; and not so lightly and wantonly pollute that “great and terrible “name of God,” which is adored by Angels, and
which

which we are not worthy so much as to mention in our prayers.

Let me then hope and desire, that the sense of God's honour, the sense of his command, and of our duty consequent thereon, together with the danger we run in committing this sin, may influence us to consideration, to repentance, and amendment; that so we may ever be restrained from "profaning the name of our God;" always remembering, that He is "the Lord," and, consequently, "will not hold him guiltless that taketh "his name in vain."

I shall conclude all with the advice of the Son of Sirach, which is excellent to the purpose before us: "Accustom not thy mouth to Swearing, neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One; " for, as the servant that is continually beaten "shall not be without a blue mark, so he that "sweareth, and nameth God continually, shall "not be faultless." Again:

"A man that useth much Swearing shall be "filled with iniquity, and the plague shall never "depart from his house: If he shall offend, his "sin shall be upon him, and if he acknowledge it "not, he maketh a double offence."

"There is a word cloathed about with death; "God grant that it be not found in the heritage "of Jacob, for all such things shall be far from "the godly."

SERMON

S E R M O N X L I X.

Against rash Vows and Promises.

ECCLESIASTES V. 2. “Be not rash with thy Mouth, and let not thine Heart be hasty to utter any before God.”

MY design from these words is to lay before you what can be produced against the heedless practice of rash Vows and inconsiderate promises. And here,

By Rashness we are to understand the doing any thing without sufficient thought and deliberation: The running ourselves hastily into matters, either without reflecting at all upon them, or without such a measure of consideration as shall enable us to make a prudent choice.

This, in the general, must appear at first sight to be ridiculous; because, it is giving up our reason, and deserting the immediate guide of our actions. But,

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This is not what I so much intend; I mean not to consider the matter in so extensive a view; What I design is, to speak concerning Rashness, as it is applied to Promises or Oaths; which, passing over a certain right to another, and giving him a claim to something from us, they ought surely to be previously well weighed and considered.

Men will see this plainly in the greater affairs of life,

What man of common sense would enter into sudden engagements without once thinking at all about them, where perhaps his whole fortune is risked, and the least false step may ruin him?

Men are generally cautious enough in such instances; and, if they are found to err, they generally meet with the contempt which they deserve. But,

If the main affairs of life are once secured, men are apt to give themselves greater licence in other particulars: They imagine lesser matters are not worth considering, as though prudence had no room to shew itself here, and men might, in things of inferior moment, be as ridiculous as they please. And,

So indeed we might allow them to be, if they would not hereby run themselves into serious difficulties; if they would take care that others might receive no prejudice from their follies, and that they

they themselves might not unawares be drawn into sin. Yet,

This doth and must prove the case where men do not sufficiently consider what promises they make. Perhaps the thing may be impossible or sinful.

Though possible, it may yet be attended with such inconveniences as may strongly tempt a man to violate his promise; or, if he should notwithstanding keep it, he may thereby be injurious to his family and dependants,

In all these cases the rash engagement is not only absurd but wicked: It is absurd, because it is not guided by that reason which ought to influence it; and it is sinful, because it either directly involves him in sin, or strongly tempts him to it.

We have several remarkable instances of this handed down to us in Holy Writ.

“The time would almost fail me to tell” of Jephtha, of Herod, and of more than forty men at once of the Jews who are our examples herein.

As to Herod, that rash person, upon a very slight occasion, made a promise to the daughter of Herodias, that “he would give her whatsoever she would ask.” He never once considered that demands might be made which were improper to be granted.

Had

Had he been exposed to this inconvenience only, the absurdity of his Rashness even here must be apparent. But,

When we consider withall, that occasion was hereby given to the making demands unlawful; when we consider what was in fact the consequence, "no less than the head of John the Baptist", the murder of the innocent and righteous; When we consider this, we cannot acquit Herod (nor with him every like person) of great sinfulness, as well as extreme folly.

As to Jephtha, and the ill fate of his rash and inconsiderate vow, it is too well known here to be enlarged on; save that as it begun in folly, it ended in the sacrifice of a most dutiful and affectionate daughter.

As to that wicked and diabolical conspiracy of the Jews, in which more than forty of them banded together, and bound themselves under a great curse that "they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul;" and the happy discovery and prevention of their horrid enterprize, this, the same time that it discovers to us the watchful care, providence, and protection of God, over righteous persons, should equally guard us against all rash and inconsiderate undertakings, especially such as have evil for their objects. But further:

In our too eager and over-fond delight of persons and things, we are sometimes, and indeed

not

not seldom, with the examples here cited, led to further extremes herein, and add to our rash promises vain and inconsiderate vows, thereby “confirming with an oath,” what would have been our wisdom to have “denied in words.”

When an extravagant promise is confirmed by the solemnity of an oath, the matter here must be exceedingly aggravated; for, an oath being a serious and religious rite ought not to be used on any slight or common occasion; much less to bind ourselves to the commission of folly, or to the perpetrating of what is really evil.

An oath is an invocation of God, as a witness to the truth of what we affirm, or to the sincerity of what we promise.

This therefore must, from the very nature of it, require great seriousness, and exceeding composure and preparation of mind.

Oaths, in common conversation; even though the things confirmed by them be true, are condemned in holy Scripture; our Saviour having required, that the utmost we should do in ordinary discourse is only to use repeated affirmatives or denials: But, they are still more criminal where the matter confirmed by them is uncertain; or, the thing promised what we may not perhaps be able to perform.

It is to affront God in a very high degree to make our appeal to Him on common occasions; and,

and, much more so, to call on Him as a witness, as well to our iniquities as our follies.

There are three things peculiarly necessary, in order to make oaths themselves lawful, (viz.)

That the matter of them be in itself lawful and weighty: That it be truly, well, and thoroughly considered by us: and that the circumstances attending the oaths we make be such as are expressive of the reverence which we owe to God.

All oaths should be performed in righteousness, in justice, and judgment. But,

In the present case, of rash Vows and Swearing, there may be, and often is, a defect in every one of these particulars.

The thing itself, about which these Oaths and Vows are made, is often of no consequence at all; or, if it be, yet still it is merely accidental with regard to him who makes them: He is too impatient of thought to bestow any reflection upon it; and therefore it is indifferent to him whether the thing engaged for be great or small, possible or impossible, lawful or unlawful.

The highest aggravation of the case is this—when the thing confirmed by this sacred engagement is in itself sinful, and especially if it implies some extraordinary degree of guilt. It is criminal to meditate what is ill, even though there be no formed resolution of doing it: It is much more so to resolve upon it, though happy accidents shall

prevent the execution of such resolves: To enter into engagements with others for this purpose carries the matter still further; but, to confirm such engagements by Oaths, and by solemn Vows and Promises, and to invoke the vengeance of the all-just Being for not doing what his soul abhors, is a circumstance so very shocking in itself, that it needs no words to aggravate it.

But further, to pursue the instances of misconduct already mentioned: And,

First, The giving general promises at large to be filled up according to the fanciful humour, extravagant folly, or sinful inclinations of the petitioner; or, like Jephtha, vow absolutely the performance of things, without any acknowledged reserves whatever.

We frequently, relying upon the modesty of the person we are too much enamoured with, enter into rash promises and engagements at large to grant them the whole of their request; and, thro' the blindness of our zeal, vow the absolute performance of uncertain conditions.

Now this, certainly, if there was nothing more in it, must be censured by every thinking man as exposing us to vast inconveniences; but, to confirm it by the solemnity of Vows, to make a venerable and sacred rite the bond of our folly is adding profaneness to indiscretion, and a trifling with religion as well as common sense.

In

In this case we lay ourselves open to unknown requests, and vow the performance of hidden events. But,

Should the best of things happen, and nothing be requested nor encounter us but what is innocent, and such as a wise and good man might reasonably give way to, yet still this is nothing to us, nor to our commendation; but should be rather ascribed to our good chance from the Providence of God rightly disposing things for us; and consequently demands from us the tribute of praise, thanksgiving, and repentance, in the amendment of our conduct for the future, "to sin no more" in any such grievous instance "lest a worse evil in time should come unto us." For,

When Vows and Promises are made in such general terms, room is left for making demands, and performing things both unreasonable and sinful. Yea,

On this footing we may determine, that the engagement itself, whatever should be the consequence, was, from the very beginning, criminal and impious. And,

It is not to be wondered therefore if a proceeding, thus bad in the beginning, should be answered and followed by events as fatal.

To resume our former instances, behold the consequences of these things !

Herod had sworn “to grant whatever the daughter of Herodias would ask of him.”

He had not considered that an engagement made in such general terms might lead him into something extremely criminal. But,

When the damsel “demanded the head of John the Baptist,” he saw his error, and was sorry; but, it was then too late: One of two evils remained for him, and he unhappily chose the greatest; rather assenting to the murder of the innocent and righteous than falsify his oath, which was in itself sinful. Again:

Can any one help lamenting the unhappy fall of Jephtha, and the rashness of his inconsiderate vow! If a Herod was sorry when he found that the sad effect of his rash promise, confirmed with an oath, was the death of the Baptist, a man whom through dislike he had shut up in prison; what upbraidings of conscience and heart-felt remorse must bow down the soul of a tender and affectionate father, sacrificing his daughter, his only child, in consequence hereof, who presented herself in gladness before him, rejoicing at her father’s triumphs!

“When he saw her, he rent his cloaths, and said, Alas, my daughter! Thou hast brought me very low, for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.”

As to that last particular, of the treacherous conspirators against Paul, we have nothing further mentioned of them; and whether they were inconsiderate of their engagement, or were starved into a compliance with nature, or died a sacrifice to their more rash and impious Vow, we know not; but, this we know, that by the care and assiduity of a good Governor, Paul was delivered from their hands, and they were left to themselves, and to be the objects of their own imprecations.

Thus notoriously did all these fall through the vice before us; and the sad effects daily flowing herefrom, though in lesser instances, are too striking to need here any further enlargement. For,

“ Hasty resolutions are seldom fortunate:” It is a piece of necessary prudence therefore for a man, before he resolves upon any thing, to consider well what may be the consequence of it.

I shall only add, that to act thus impetuously, without the direct guide of our reason, is to act beside the common practice of our nature: God hath endued us with reason that we might purposely reflect—that we might consider our ways and be wise—that we might govern our inordinate passions, and all zeal without knowledge, the general incentives to all precipitateness.

To be governed by reason is the general law imposed by the Author of nature upon man, whose uppermost faculty is reason.

It is therefore beneath the dignity of our nature to act thus blindly in important points, and precipitately without reason; being ourselves, in this case, in subjection to inferior faculties, which should be subject to us.

Think therefore before you speak, and consider before you promise.

Take time to deliberate and advise, but lose no time in executing your resolutions. :

Great things are said by the Heathens in favour of reason: “Reason (say they) is the image of “God;” “is the governing part of the soul;” yea, “supreme and principal,” “the first quality “in the soul.”

What is thus highly exalted should always maintain its dignity, and be the governing principle in all our actions.

“Be not therefore rash with thy mouth, and let “not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before “God;” for, “God needeth not the sacrifice of “fools; neither will He be pleased with the devices “of the ignorant.”

S E R M O N L.

How far rash Vows are obligatory and binding to Performance.

ECCLES. v. 4. "Pay that which thou hast vowed."

"**B**ETTER is it that thou shouldst not vow,
"than vow and not pay."

It hath been matter of query with some how far the obligation of rash Promises and Vows doth in several cases reach.

I have observed, under a former reflection, that rash Promises and Vows are not only absurd, but sinful; and yet we dare not affirm, that merely on this account they cease to oblige.

What was faulty in the original, may be binding in its consequences. And, accordingly,

There is a maxim which will hold in this case, as well as some others, "that those things, which, upon account of some irregularity, ought not to have been done at first, are yet valid and binding when done."

There

There are therefore instances in which the Rashness of our engagements cannot excuse us from performing them ; and where, if some difficulties and inconveniences should arise, we must bear them as the punishment of not having considered better.

It is the character of an honest man (given us by the Psalmist) that “ he sweareth to his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.”

The words before us are fully expressive hereto :—
“ When thou vowest a Vow, defer not to pay it.”
“ Pay that which thou hast vowed.”

“ Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.” “ Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin, neither say thou before the Angel, that it was an error :—
“ Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice ?”

Again in Deuteronomy we have it expressed to us under the Law :

“ When thou shalt vow a Vow, thou shalt not slack to pay it ; for, it will surely be required of thee ; and it will be sin in thee.” But,

“ If thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.”

“ That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform, according as thou hast vowed, and according as thou hast promised with thy mouth.”

“ If a man vow a Vow unto the Lord, or swear
“ an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not
“ break his word, he shall do according to all that
“ proceedeth out of his mouth.” Again:

“ Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt
“ perform unto the Lord thine Oaths.”

In matters of private discretion, or advantage, it concerns us to look well to things in the beginning; but, if we fail here, and bind ourselves down to that which may be prejudicial in its consequences, we must not think of retreating when it is too late. The promise, and perhaps the oath of God is upon us, and we must perform it to the full.

We have a singular instance of this in Joshua, and the Princes of Israel with him, who were observant of their oath towards the inhabitants of Gibeon, and spared them, notwithstanding they had fraudulently obtained the oath and promise from them: “ We have sworn unto them (said they) by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them.” JOSHUA ix. 19.

In all cases of this nature, we pass over some right or other from ourselves; and therefore must be bound so far as we are capable of making that right away.

If then what we either promise simply, or else engage by oath, be a thing which we might lawfully have done, without any engagement of that kind,

kind, it is certain and evident that we are bound to perform it; for, there can be no such thing as obligation at all, if Promises and Vows are not inviolably to be kept.

Thus far we do affirm, that those very Vows which were perhaps rash and criminal in the making, may yet bind and tie us down to the performance. Yet,

There are other cases in which Vows and Oaths themselves cannot oblige—in which we cannot or must not act; and consequently where we have nothing else to do but to repent of those engagements which we are unable to, or durst not answer. These are reducible to two heads.

First, Where the thing engaged for is impossible. And,

Secondly, Where it is in itself, or in its circumstances, unlawful.

I shall say very little of those Oaths, Promises, and Vows, which regard things impossible.

The obligation of such is affirmed by no one. For,

We cannot assign a better reason for the non-performance of any thing than this, that it is absolutely beyond our power. But,

Notwithstanding there is no obligation to performance, yet, there is to repentance.

Perhaps it would be proper to attempt some amends, in the ways we are able, for the whole of which

which we are incapable. This at least deserves to be considered, and as such I leave it with you.

Secondly, The most considerable case is that, where the matter of our Vows and Promises is unlawful.

To resume here again the instances which we have so often had occasion to have recourse to under these subjects:

Jephtha and Herod had both of them virtually sworn to be the death of their victims, by engaging themselves under general Vows of performance.

The former, to "sacrifice whatever should come forth of the doors of his house to meet him."

The latter, to "grant whatever the Damsel should ask or demand of him."

As to the Conspirators against the life of the Apostle, they (as they had actually sworn against his life) were therefore actually guilty of it before God, though, by happy means preventing, they were kept therefrom.

But, besides these, hasty declarations and rash asseverations are sometimes made by good men, who cannot however reasonably or conscientiously fulfill them.

When Jesus had washed the feet of several of his disciples, He came to Simon Peter; and "Peter said unto Him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" Jesus answered, and said, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.

"Peter

“ Peter said unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet ! Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” Nor can even Vows, however solemn, be binding, when the object of them is the commission of a crime ; for, though appeals to the Deity are sacred pledges of our sincerity, yet, they make no change in the nature or legality of actions ; and, it would be the grossest superstition to suppose, that the violation of God’s ordinances can either be honourable or acceptable to Him.

David, in revenge for an insult offered by Nabal, vowed, that he would put to the sword every male of his family ; but, his wrath was afterwards appeased ; and he became so sensible of the injustice of his design, that he said, “ Blessed be the Lord who hath kept his servant from evil.”

In all these cases the thing itself was sinful, and the Oaths and Vows unlawful, as to the matter, and therefore without any effect,* or obligation, as to the consequence.

This

“ * It is uncivil and unfit for a man to oblige another to keep a promise disadvantageous to him, or one made in mirth, passion, haste, unadvisedly, in civility, &c.—as also not to admit of a reasonable excuse, in case of failure.”

“ Those

This determination shall be supported, by observing, that no one can give another a right to claim from him what he had no right to give; nor bind himself to do that which he had no right to perform.

Every binding Oath, Promise, or Vow, must suppose the man capable of being bound who makes it. And,

This must further suppose, that he might or had authority to perform what he pretends thus to oblige himself to. Otherwise,

This absurdity, or contradiction, will arise, (viz.) that, at the very same time, a man may be under contradictory obligations:

An original obligation to forbear an action, in obedience to God's will, and a contrary obligation to perform the action, in consequence of his own Oath, Promise, and Vow.

If this absurdity be not sufficiently apparent, we may add, that these two opposite obligations must mutually destroy each other, as all things equal and contrary, when in contact, necessarily do.

That in such a case as this, a man is really under no obligation at all to act either way, but is entirely

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and

“ Those promises are not to be kept that a man makes
“ when he is either compelled by fear, or deceived by
“ fraud: In all Promises, the intention is to be con-
“ sidered, not the letter; none binding but what are just.”

and absolutely at his liberty; and, consequently, upon the foot of arguing, no obligation can possibly arise from Promises or Oaths where the subject matter of them is unlawful. But,

Perhaps it may be said, that the obligation arising from the Promise or Oath removes all former obligation—that the man is thenceforward bound to fulfil his new engagement—and therefore that the above-mentioned difficulty is avoided, by maintaining, that two opposite obligations do not subsist together, the latter destroying the former, to which it succeeds.

This evasion must appear to be indefensible from what hath been already observed. For,

If we were originally bound to obey the will of God, we could have no right or authority to disobey him in the least. And,

Of consequence, we could not lay ourselves under any kind of obligation to disobey Him. It were a contradiction to suppose that God would oblige us hereto.

As to man, he could not; because, a lower obligation cannot possibly make void a greater.

I shall add one consideration further to this purpose.

If it be still affirmed, that the latter obligation doth, in this case, destroy the former, then, we shall run ourselves into this absurdity, (viz.) that we have it in our power, at any time, to make void

void all kind of obligation whatever. A contrary Promise or Vow, it seems, will do the business. At this rate, what single point, either in religion or morality, can be sufficiently bound upon us?

Nay, upon the same principle by which it should be maintained that Vows and Oaths are obligatory, where the matter of them is unlawful, we clearly prove, that they cannot at all oblige. I suppose it cannot be questioned, whether one Oath or Vow doth not as much oblige as another; and whether, if one obligation may be destroyed by a succeeding, this will not as well hold concerning any other supposable obligation, which may be equally destroyed by it.

A man must, on this foot, have it in his power to make void all obligations whenever he pleases, and that only by making a contrary Vow thereto, and this he may do as often as humour or interest may suit him.

If this be once admitted, faith must fail from among men, and it would be difficult to shew how any man can be strictly obliged to any thing.

Upon the whole: Since then we have no right or authority to do an ill thing; and consequently cannot, by any act of ours, change the nature of things, and make that lawful which is in itself sinful, we declare that we are not bound hereto; but that every act of that kind must be null and void from the beginning; and therefore rather to be

retracted with sincere repentance, than fulfilled in sinful perseverance.

There are few indeed (thank God) who come up to those already recited ; they are rare, and the height of their malignity may sufficiently account for it ; scarce any pretend to justify these things by alledging an Oath as an excuse for committing them, or think that in such shocking instances as these the plea would be available. Yet,

They sometimes act by the same principle in other instances. They do ill, because they have promised, or perhaps sworn to do it ; as though a plea, which they themselves would condemn in one instance, ought not to be as much censured in another.

Let us here put a case which happens too often, and apply to it what I have hitherto remarked.

This will make the reflections before us more useful, when it is seen, that they do not refer only to imaginary cases, but are equally applicable to matters of certain and known fact.

A child perhaps proves obstinate, as well as disobedient to a parent, in some articles which concern him : He cannot be influenced, either by persuasion or authority, but still continues refractory.

It is not to be wondered at if such a conduct should be resented.

Something this way may be proper ; but the misfortune is, that matters are apt to be carried too far,

The

The man, in a passion, disinherits his child ; resolves never more to bear the least favourable respect towards him ; confirms these resolutions by Oaths and Imprecations ; and will “ leave no “ room for the child’s repentance, even though he “ should seek it carefully with tears.”

The question arising from the case is this ; Is the parent bound by any Oaths of this kind, however made, or frequently repeated, entirely to desert his child ?

By no means :—The Vow was rash, and the matter of it unlawful ; and therefore, agreeable to the principles already laid down, can bind, not to performance, but to repentance. But,

It will be said, perhaps, May not a man do what he will with his own, and dispose of his fortune in what manner he pleases, and take that liberty which the laws of his country allow him ? I think not, in all cases. If a man were to be virtuous and honest no further than he might otherwise be prosecuted in a Civil Court, he might be extremely wicked : Much is left to the determination of conscience, and it concerns men to decide faithfully.

To come more home to the point, there is a natural obligation from which no man can free himself, (viz.) to take some care of his children : That being which a man gave life to, he must, according to the law of nature (if able) sustain.

“ He (saith St. Paul) that careth not for his own, especially those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

Ill conduct and disobedience may forfeit favours, and things which are the encouragements of obedience ; but matters of right, such as is a subsistence (if the parent is capable of affording it) cannot be forfeited.

To afford this, he was bound originally as a parent ; and therefore no rash or irregular act of his can afterward render the obligation of none effect. But,

It may be said, Are children to be all placed on an equal footing ; and is no distinction to be made either to encourage the good, or to repress the wicked ?—This we dare not say : Room is here left for the exercise of prudence, and to carry on domestic affairs wisely. Upon the whole :

Thus much, I think, may be affirmed safely :

First, That whatever the conduct of a child may be, yet still he retains a right to common and ordinary subsistence. This the parent is naturally bound to afford him, if he can ; and no engagements to the contrary can here disannul it.

Secondly, It may be affirmed, that as a child who hath once proved disobedient, though in an important article, may afterwards repent, so, upon his repentance, the parent is bound to pardon him.

him. This is a principle as well of natural as revealed religion. And,

If he is bound to pardon, he must, of consequence, be obliged to shew all the proper marks and tokens of pardon.

An Oath or Vow therefore never to forgive, must be in itself unlawful; and, as he had no right to make it, he can have no right to keep it.

Several other particulars, relating to the purpose before us, might here be mentioned. But,

Thus much may be of some use; and I trust, as occasion shall require, will be properly applied.

SERMON

S E R M O N L I.

Against Anger.

EPHES. iv. 26. “Be ye angry, and sin not.”

THIS precept seems to be one of the nicest of all others, and hardest to be put in practice. For,

How difficult is it never to be angry but upon a just cause; and when the cause of our anger is just not to be transported beyond due bonds, either as to the degree of our anger, or in the duration and continuance of it:

This is so very nice a matter, that one would be almost tempted to think that it were, in effect, a prohibition of anger in every case: “Be ye angry and sin not,” (i. e.) be ye so, if ye can, without sin.

That I may give some solution to a matter so seemingly difficult, I shall speak to these words in the following order:

First, I shall shew how far Anger may be maintained as innocent by the laws of Christianity.

Secondly,

Secondly, Caution you against excess herein, as it is not only pernicious, but sinful.

Concluding with such hints as may prompt us to the due regulation of it.

Every faculty which God hath given us was doubtless given to profit withal.

This is the dictate of natural reason, revelation also confirming the same. For,

Neither of them design to annihilate and root out our passions, but to regulate and govern them; not to destroy their being, but to restrain their excess, and to direct and govern them, both as to the object and degree.

Anger and Resentment are as natural to the human mind as grief and sorrow, or even as cold and hunger are to the body; and to prevent them belongs neither to the province nor power of reason: In this respect the mind is purely passive: This internal sense is a thing quite distinct from reason, and hath no connection with it; it depends not upon arguments and choice, but is derived from nature, and acts, and is acted upon, by necessity.

It is not therefore the supplanting the passions of men (which God for many wise ends and uses hath vouchsafed us) but only the due regulation of them, which the Apostle here particularly aims at.

“Be ye angry, and sin not.”

What

What is here said of Anger, may, in a great measure, be applied to all other inclinations whatever: They have all their use. But,

They are only then useful when they are under the guidance and dominion of reason. When they are suffered to break loose from that state of subjection, though they promise pleasure, yet, they always give pain.

The art of governing our passions, therefore, is more useful and important than we may perhaps imagine; much more useful than many things, in the search and pursuit of which we spend our days.

Without this art, riches and health, and skill and knowledge will give but little satisfaction; yea, whatever else we possess, without this we can neither be happy, wise, nor good.

That Anger then, considered in itself, and upon all occasions whatever, is unlawful, neither the most rigid Philosophers, nor the severest Christians, have ever been able to prove.

It is one of the passions implanted in us by nature.

The first motions of it seem to be necessary, because natural; the slowness or hastiness thereto depending, in great measure, upon the temper of the body, and our natural animal spirits; thus far it is not subject to the power of our own will, or to the subjection of reason and religion: It is a passion (like all other simple and natural ones) capable

capable of serving excellent purposes, when managed with sobriety and discretion. For,

There is a tameness of spirit which deserves censure and rebuke ; and, in some cases, “ we “ even do well to be angry.”

Admitting Anger, according to the received notion of it, to proceed from a desire of obtaining satisfaction for some injury done to us, or to those whom we love—the honour of God—the reverence due to the laws—the love of virtue, and the protection of good men, may make this not only innocent, but necessary and commendable : For instance,

When the name of God, his word and truth (things which ought to be most sacred) are boldly violated, and impiously trampled upon, no good Christian can, none in a public character should see this done without indignation ; but is obliged sharply to rebuke such offenders for their daring wickedness and folly.

Thus Moses was exceedingly provoked, and “ his Anger waxed hot” at the molten calf which the Israelites had made, to dishonour God and themselves. Yea,

And our blessed Saviour himself, the perfect pattern of meekness and patience, is said not only to have grieved, but to have looked “ upon the “ Pharisees with Anger, because of the hardness of “ their heart.” And,

As

As these occasions, where the glory of God and the good of others are concerned, justify some resentment of this kind, so St. Paul, in the Scripture now before us, seems to imply, that they may be warrantable also with regard to private injuries and affronts, provided always that due care be taken to restrain their excesses, and to conquer and compose them in time,

Which is the second thing I proposed to consider.

Anger, though innocent at first when justly provoked, yet, when once we give way thereto beyond the bounds of moderation and reason, from thence begins its sting, and both it, and all its consequences, are deadly and condemning.

It is therefore very observable how this caution runs, “ Be ye angry, and sin not ; let not the sun “ go down upon your wrath, neither give place “ to the Devil.”

The manner of which exhortation plainly argues, that, however, upon some occasions, and in some degrees, Anger may be lawful, yet, the justest Anger cannot be excused when it continues long.

Although, as we have already observed, the first motions of our passion may not be under our check and jurisdiction—though we desire, and grieve, and resent, as naturally and unavoidably as we hunger or thirst, yet, when that first gust is over, the governing part of the soul may and ought to interpose

Interpose its powers ; and, by a timely and prudent care, quell the rebellious disturber of our peace. Allay the storm we may, and must, though we could not prevent the first blowing of the wind, nor the swelling of the waves when it blew.

No Heathen masters of morality ever mention the peevish without blame ; but, for the sullen and morose, who feed upon the bitter morsel and turn it into gall, into wormwood, and bitterness, no terms of reproach were ever thought too hard for them :

Much less will Christianity endure the harbouring and cherishing of any evil thoughts. If these intrude, we must immediately cast them out, compose our spirits, and return to a peaceful and kind disposition.

Silent grudges and quarrels perpetuated, or industriously prolonged, can never be consistent with the obedience of that master who hath so solemnly enjoined all his servants to forgive and love their enemies.

No man therefore can nourish a lasting Anger without living in open defiance to the duty he owes both to God and man, (viz.) that of charity to both. For,

It is certain, that every one who continues in a state of enmity and wrath commits a fault which the highest provocations can never justify. But further :

As those then offend who exceed herein, so no less do those also who are “angry without a cause;” who are worked up to all the extravagancies of rage and madness for mere trifles; who are incensed against brute beasts, at things inanimate, and at crosses purely accidental, in which there can be no foundation for anger: In a word, who are angry at those things which a good man would think deserved his thanks rather than resentment, or a wise man should overlook as not worth his notice.

Having thus shewn how far Anger may be consistent with the laws of Christianity, and wherein it becomes sinful—I shall now,

Lastiy, Lay before you such hints and considerations as may (if we allow them their due influence) effectually regulate us herein. And,

First, Whenever a just cause of resentment is given, let us be careful not to exceed in the measure of it, nor cherish a passion deeper and fiercer than the offence can justify.

Above all, let us beware and not be angry without a cause; for, if we are, we thereby commit sin: Causeless Anger and Anger in excess are highly offensive to Almighty God, we being “in danger of judgment” for it, as God himself expressly declares; nor can even the most solemn sacrifices atone for it without repentance, it being ranged in the catalogue of the most horrid and crying sins. Besides,

What

What great contradiction is there between such excessive fierceness of passion, and the true temper of the Christian religion.

This, above all things, labours to inspire peace and good-will, love and tenderness, meekness and mutual respect: Virtues these that make society useful, and conversation sweet and easy. But,

These can never consist with those fretful and fiery dispositions which flame out into passion upon every trifle; and, where justly provoked, exceed beyond measure. “ If therefore ye have bitter strife and envyings in your hearts, glory not, “ and lye not against the truth: This wisdom “ descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sen- “ sual, devilish; ” yea, “ the wrath of man worketh “ not the righteousness of God.” Besides,

What aggravates these excesses in passion, is, the manifest injustice of them.

He that is driven to act by the furiousness of Anger measures not the actions of his brother by the true standard of equity, but purely by resentment. For,

Self being at the bottom of all his indignation, the crime hath but little concern in the matter.

Another dissuasive against proneness to Anger, is, the uncertainty to what lengths it may carry us. By Anger men are often excited to acts of the most atrocious nature, beyond what their imagination could first conceive: “ Death and de-

“ struction are too often before them, only because “ they have not known the way of peace.” None of the social duties, nor the virtues of a good life can be practised by them in this their state ; for, “ the very foundations of the earth are out of “ course” with them, and God and Providence are indiscriminately arraigned.

Lastly, If the evil habits which the soul contracts in this world, whilst united to the body, continue after its separation from it (as we have all the assurance they will), then, a mind thus always discomposed must be very unfit for the society of spirits, who have no such turbulent passions, and for a place in the mansions of love and peace ; from which therefore it will be for ever excluded : as “ all things that either hurt or “ offend will be gathered out of the kingdom of “ God.”

These are some of the ill effects and pernicious consequences of sinful anger ; whence it is evident, that if we value our safety, ease, or reputation here, or our future happiness hereafter, we must strive against it, and bring it into due subjection, which we can no better do than by carefully observing and putting in practice the few following remedies, which I shall now briefly lay before you as a conclusion to the whole. And,

First, Let us have an humble and modest opinion of our own deserts ; for pride, above all things,

things, renders men quickly provoked, and implacable when they are so: So says the Wise Man, “only by pride cometh contention, but with the well-advised is wisdom.”

The considerate and religious are calm and cool; not hastily inflamed, nor at any time outrageous; which should they suffer themselves to be, their character is forfeited, and their virtue borne down and lost; for, where “envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.”

A second remedy against this sin would be frequently to reflect on the horrible deformity of it.

For, what agonies of mind—what disorder of spirits—what fury and frenzy does it hurry a man into! These are things so notorious, and so incident to the passion of Anger, that I need not further enforce them.

Another excellent preservative would be not to suffer our Anger to arise, till we have thoroughly examined the matter, and have well weighed the consequence of it. Admirable to this purpose is the wise son of Sirach’s advice: “Admonish a friend, it may be he hath not done it, and if he hath done, that he do it no more: Admonish a friend, for many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale.”

Could we once bring ourselves to this resolution, the business I am labouring at were done: All
hasty

hasty and precipitate passion would effectually, by this means, be prevented ; for, in the time of this consideration our minds would find leisure to cool, and we should scarce ever be angry at all ; but certainly never without cause.

To conclude : What I have here endeavoured at is not the utter abolishing the passions of men, for that were even against nature itself, but only to regulate and reform them, and to “ bring them into subjection to the obedience of Christ : ”

It is, that ye may “ be angry and sin not ; ” or rather, “ if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, “ that ye live peaceably with all men.”

SERMON

SERMON LII.

Peaceableness, the Opposite of Anger.

HEB. xii. 14. “Follow Peace with all Men.”

THE end and design of religion is to make men wiser and better; to improve, exalt, and perfect their nature; to teach them the practice of all social duties, in their utmost extent, to all their fellow-creatures, according to their several stations and abilities: “Follow Peace with all men.”

The cares of the world, and the lusts of the flesh, are not the only enemies to the repose of a Christian. For,

Supposing him by contentment and purity, victorious, in a great measure, over these, yet, he will find it necessary for his happiness to guard against the evils which too commonly arise from the connections of society, from the mistakes or injuries of others, or from his own imprudent and petulant passions.

In

In order to overcome these, he will find it necessary to study and pursue that Peaceableness of disposition which is an essential branch of the Christian religion, and to strive “by all means (if “it be possible) to live peaceably with all men.”

In speaking further to this point I shall pursue the following method:

First, I shall explain the meaning and import of the duty before us. And then,

Secondly, The several means of attaining it: After which I shall,

Thirdly, Subjoin such considerations as may be proper to enforce the same.

First, Of Peaceableness in its general acceptance.

I need not here use many words to shew what it is; it is easily and universally understood: would to God it were as universally practised; then, such exhortations as these would be needless. But,

Though an account of the duty may not be requisite to inform even the meanest or most ignorant among us, yet, it may be of use to recall to our minds what we already know, and to awaken in us lively and sensible impressions of it. To this end therefore I shall, in a very brief and plain manner, speak to it.

To “follow Peace” is so to demean ourselves in all the offices and stations of life as to promote a friendly

friendly understanding and correspondence among those we converse with.

Particularly the man of this disposition (the man of Peace) will be sure to exert it by all proper methods, and to manifest its reality by the whole tenor of his conduct.

Meek and lowly in his own opinion, and full of benevolence towards all his fellow-creatures, he will endeavour to "keep the unity of the spirit in "the bond of peace," by every decent and becoming action; and, as far as is consistent with prudence and his station, will calm the stormy spirits of men, and quiet their turbulent passions; and, by every gentle and persuasive art, soften the minds of contending parties; accounting it the joy of his heart to promote, to confirm, and increase "Peace on earth, and good-will among men."

Such is the import, and such is the manner in which this aimable disposition is to exert itself; to cultivate which will require our calling in to our aid all the pious helps and expedients with which either reason or religion can furnish us; and which therefore I shall now,

Secondly, Point out to you.

There are, indeed, so many of this kind, that time will fail me to mention them all, or even to dwell as much as I ought on those which I shall mention.

First,

First, The rise of most of our disquiets and discords is, from the tumultuous and disorderly motions of our passions ; these therefore must in the first place be well regulated, especially that fierce and boisterous passion of Anger which discovers itself the earliest, and is tamed the latest of any, and is, of all others, the greatest enemy to our repose ; this therefore, and the rest, must be brought under the discipline and government of reason, if ever we hope to be easy to ourselves or others : and indeed unless we are first easy to ourselves, it is impossible we should be so to others : We may as well expect perpetual sun-shine in climates subject to continual storms, as that there should be a lasting Peace in that breast where the passions are allowed to reign.

He who is free from impetuous passions provokes no man, nor is he easily provoked himself.

Secondly, They who desire to “ live peaceably “ with all men” must refrain from slander and evil-speaking. An infallible method of losing friends, and adding to the number of our enemies, and making their enmity perpetual, is, to be busy-bodies, tale-bearers, and evil-speakers.

The observation in the Gospel that “ with “ what measure we mete it shall be measured to us “ again” will be more than fulfilled in this case ; “ Full measure, heaped up and running over,” those, who have been injured by us, will “ return “ into

“into our bosom ;” for, men who are weak in other respects are here strong and mighty to do evil ; indignation making even the dull quick to discover, and the stupid skilful to expose the faults of an enemy.

Another rule to be observed by those who live peaceably with all men, is, to avoid the familiarity of malicious, quarrelsome, and censorious people —the reason is evident : We imitate those with whom we converse, and insensibly conform ourselves to their behaviour : If we keep up friendship with such, we shall probably comply with them more than we ought ; judge partially in their behalf, and enter into their quarrels.

We may, indeed, and we must often converse with men of all tempers, “else (as the Apostle says) we must needs go out of the world.” But,

In the choice of our friends, we should be circumspect, and avoid those who have the unhappy art of making themselves many enemies. Again :

They who would “live peaceably with all men” must be patient and long-suffering—must overlook and forgive injuries. “It must needs be “that offences come,” and since we have all of us faults of our own, and failings to be excused by those with whom we converse, we are bound, upon that account, to return the forbearance of which we ourselves do so often stand in need.

He who will excuse no faults, cannot himself expect

expect to be excused. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, after having given a like precept as this before us, of " living peaceably," subjoins, " Bless those who persecute you : Recompence to " no man evil for evil :" " Avenge not yourselves, " overcome evil with good."

Another good quality which produces and preserves Peace, is, what is called civility of manners. I know not whether we may reckon it a virtue, but surely it belongs nearly to it.

Many offences are committed against it, not perhaps through malignity of heart, but through capriciousness, hastiness, and inattention. Goodness of heart is the main thing, yet, external forms are not to be neglected.

A rough and forbidding manner is supposed to arise from pride and contempt ; and contempt, is, of an ill usage, what we can least endure or excuse.

Another quality necessary for the cultivation of Peace, is, modesty and humility.

Nothing is more contrary to our repose, and that of others, than haughtiness and presumption.

Every one dislikes the over-bearing man, who exacts from others a reverence which we chuse not to pay as a debt, but to give as a favour freely and without constraint ; and to give it to those who deserve it best, though at the same time who, through humility, demand it least from us. But further :

They

They who would live peaceably with all should do good to all: We are certainly made to do kind offices; and every deserving man has a right to expect and require it from us.

Human laws cannot indeed easily fix this claim; but, men will supply this defect by their flighting and censuring such offenders. But,

He who loves his neighbour, and shews it by his actions, will infallibly secure their general love and esteem.

Lastly, There is nothing which will more enable us to live peaceably than a due sense of the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and the small value of those possessions which end with it, if not before: An immoderate love of pleasure, of the world, and the things therein, being the only cause of all the feuds and factions here before us.

Thus have I explained the duty of living peaceably, and shewn you some of the most effectual methods of performing it:

What remains, is, that we see what strong obligations we are all under hereto, and that towards all men: "Follow Peace with all men."

This peaceful temper is one certain mark and fruit of the Spirit: "The fruits of the Spirit (faith " St. Paul) are Love, Peace."

It is mentioned as one principal thing wherein the kingdom of God in the heart doth consist:

VOL. IV.

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"The

“ The kingdom of God is not meat and drink,
“ but righteousness, and Peace, and joy in the
“ Holy Ghost.”

To the peaceable, Christ promises an especial blessing, “ Blessed are the Peace-makers.” And, St. Paul assures us, that “ if we live in Peace, the God of love and Peace will be with us.”

From all which we gather, that unless we labour after this divine principle, “ the fruit of the Spirit,” “ the gift of God,” we are not his children. But,

Though the necessity of this disposition to our becoming real Christians is obligation sufficient to quicken our endeavours for the attainment of peace, yet, if we reflect but a moment on the happiness which it brings, and the disquietude which the want of it occasions, we shall be further urged to the pursuit of it.

How happy is that heart—how easy is that life—how serene and earnest is that devotion where true peace reigns !

How delightful is that conversation which is accompanied with a mutual confidence and courtesy—how calm the mind, how composed the affections, how tranquil the countenance, melodious the voice, sweet the sleep, and full of content the whole life of him who neither deviseth evil against others, nor suspecteth any to be devised against himself!—whose heart is ever open to the

com-

commiseration, and whose hands are ever ready to the relief of others, and who wishes, like the God he adores, to be and to do good continually !

On the other hand, how ungrateful and unpleasant a thing is it to live in a state of enmity, wrath, dissention !—having the thoughts distracted with solicitous care, anxious suspicion, and envious regret !—the heart boiling with choler, the face over-clouded with discontent, the tongue in continual jars, and the ears filled with discordant clamour and reproach !—the whole frame, both of body and soul, distempered, and in continual war ; self-discontent and hatred to others preventing the man for ever from pouring forth one acceptable prayer to our Lord, “ the Prince of Peace, and “ God of Love !”

Who, in this view, doth not discern the excellency of a peaceable disposition. But,

Besides the comforts arising from such a disposition, we are under the highest obligation to cultivate it from His example who is “ the Prince “ of Peace,” and who came into the world on that most blessed errand of obtaining reconciliation between an offended God and a sinful people, and to preach to that people the glad tidings thereof: He first reconciled God to man, and then endeavoured to reconcile men to each other.

Most unworthy therefore shall we be of the sacred name we bear if we live in disobedience to his laws, in discord and jar among ourselves.

When He came into the world, He, by his Angels, proclaimed Peace, and when he left it He bequeathed the same unto us : " Peace I give unto you ; my Peace I leave with you."

Lastly, We are obliged to cultivate a peaceable disposition if ever we hope to enter into that heavenly world which is described to us as a state of perfect love and harmony, and into which neither complaint nor clamour can ever enter ; but where blessed souls shall converse together in perfect amity and Peace.

Of this we may form some faint conceptions from the paradise which even this world would prove, if men would chearfully conspire in affection, and benevolently contribute to each other's content.

This will be the case in that happy realm where the same disposition to love and Peace will reign in all its inhabitants ; where all will be united in one great end, and " the God of Peace and love" will be the eternal center of all their affections and joys.

This prospect should surely quicken our zeal to improve in a temper which is so absolutely necessary to our admission into and enjoyment of those realms where nothing discordant can enter.

" Happy

“ Happy is the man then who hath sown in his
“ breast the seeds of benevolence ; the produce
“ thereof shall be charity and love,

“ From the fountain of his heart shall rise ri-
“ vers of goodness ; and the streams shall overflow
“ for the benefit of mankind,

“ He calmeth the fury, he healeth the quarrels
“ of angry men, and preventeth the mischiefs of
“ strife and animosity,

“ He promoteth in his neighbourhood Peace
“ and good-will, and his name is repeated with
“ praise and benedictions ; the praise of it shall en-
“ dure for ever,”

S E R M O N LIII.

Against Revenge, &c.

ROM. xii. 19. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath.”

THE Apostle, from a well-grounded assurance of the happiness of a well-spent life, lays down in this chapter several excellent rules for the more perfect guiding us therein; inculcating, in an especial manner, the great duty of brotherly-love and kindness; particularly cautioning us against rendering “evil for evil;” earnestly intreating us, by the endearing appellation of “dearly beloved, not to avenge yourselves, but rather to give place unto wrath,” from a full conviction and thorough belief of God’s being Him alone to whom vengeance belongeth.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for, it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.”

Vengeance

Vengeance being the sole prerogative of God must not be usurped by man, his creature. To make which truth appear, I shall lay before you the following heads of enquiry, And shew,

First, the sin and folly of the Vice before us. And then,

Secondly, The several reasons why we should avoid it.

First, Of the folly of Revenge, and its sin in general.

The root of Revenge is in the weakness of the soul ; the most abject and timorous are the most subject to it ; whereas a greatness of soul despiseth the offence.

There is no passion of our nature more turbulent, or which hurries us into greater disorders, than that of Revenge.

Ill-will, hatred, and Revenge are very troublesome and vexatious passions : Both the devising of mischief, the accomplishment of it, and the reflection upon it afterwards are all uneasy ; and the consequences of it many times pernicious to ourselves. The very design of Revenge is troublesome, and puts the spirits into an unnatural ferment and tumult. The man that meditates it is always restless ; his very soul is stung and boils with choler ; is in pain and anguish, and hath no ease nor enjoyment of himself so long as this passion reigns within him.

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The execution perhaps may be attended with some present pleasure ; but that pleasure is unreasonable, brutish, momentary, and short, and when once executed would perhaps be gladly recalled, were it in his power, though even at the expence of the world were he master of it.

So that, if there be any pleasure in Revenge, it is of so short continuance that we know not where to fix it ; for, there is nothing but tumult and rage, before the execution of it, and after it, nothing but remorse and horror ; and who, without madness, would purchase so short a pleasure at so dear a price ?

Cain is a fearful instance of this kind : After he had slain his brother, how was he tormented with the guilt of what he had done, and in an agony exclaimed, " My punishment is greater than I can bear ! " — How fearful did his guilt make him : " Every one that findeth me (saith he) will slay me ! " — His conscience naturally foreboded the demerit of his crime. But, I am rather anticipating what I was more particularly to mention under this head, (viz.)

The sinfulness of it,

The person who hath injured us is our fellow-creature, and created after the image of God : Both which considerations should make us forego all thoughts of revenge from him. However he may behave himself towards us, yet, there is a respect

respect due to the dignity of human nature, without violating which we cannot either hate or hurt his person.

Our enemy is to be considered as a member of society, and having, for that reason, an interest in the laws of it, which are particularly designed to protect all persons from private insults, or acts of Revenge whatever.

For any person therefore to take upon himself to call his enemy to account, or to award such a punishment as he thinks due to him, is to usurp an authority which does not belong to him, and which he cannot without great injustice exercise.

Have we, may I ask, a right to judge in our own cause?—to be a party in the act, and yet to pronounce sentence on it?

Before we condemn, therefore, let another say it is just. For,

Though resentment of injury is a natural passion, and implanted in us for wise and good ends, yet, considering the manifold partialities which most men have for themselves, were every one to act as judge in his own cause, and to execute the sentence dictated by his own resentment, it is but too evident that mankind would pass all bounds in their fury, and the last sufferer be provoked in his turn to make full reprisals: So that evil, thus encountering with evil, would produce one continued series

series of violence and misery, and render society intolerable, if not impracticable. But further:

As reason teaches to forego Revenge, so revelation, above all things, dissuades us from it, (i. e.) that we should never think of avenging ourselves upon any man. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves:" Whoever therefore exercises it, usurps to himself what does not belong to him. For,

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." It is in much better hands than ours; for, He will hereafter amply "recompence tribulation to them that trouble us;" and in the mean time hath not denied us a present remedy, allowing one which we may lawfully have recourse to, in the public administration of justice, provided we do it in judgment, without either mixture of hatred or Revenge.

For private persons to take upon them to avenge themselves is directly subversive of the peace and happiness of society, and most contrary to the end of all government among men.

So far are we Christians from being intrusted with any such destructive privilege, that it would be hard to say what is more strictly, frequently, or solemnly forbidden us. We are "not to return evil for evil, but contrarywise (if possible) to overcome evil with good." It is our duty, so far as is not inconsistent with the principles of reason, to bear with the failings and infirmities,

the

the follies and offences of our brethren, and to shew all meekness to all men. Indeed,

Human nature is so desirous of Revenge, that no doctrine of the Gospel is more full of self-denial than this of “forgiving enemies, and over-“coming their evil with good.”

Carnal reason is ready to suggest many plausible arguments against it; and we must master our most ungovernable passions before we can practice it; but, the difficulties of any duty, or the seeming inconveniences of it, should only make us the more careful and diligent to perform it. And,

Were they in this case greater than they really are, yet with what pretence can any Christian object against them, since we know that Christ our Saviour, who taught us this doctrine prior to the Apostle, and requires our obedience to it, did always, in the most inimitable manner, practice it Himself.

The Law, indeed, according to the literal expression of it, seems to countenance acts of this kind; and our Saviour himself expressly says, that “He came not to destroy the Law and the Pro-“phets, but to fulfil them:” How then (may it be said) are these things reconcileable with the doctrine before us, with the practice of our Saviour, and with the many precepts which He hath delivered to us upon this head?

For

For the better understanding of which it may be proper to look a little into those laws of Moses wherein these things are cited.

The first we have recorded is in Exodus: "If a man strive and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief (i. e. no other mischief) follow, he shall surely be punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him, and he shall pay as the Judges determine; and if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

Another, and similar, is in Leviticus: "If a man cause a blemish in his neighbour, as he hath done, so shall it be done unto him: Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again."

The like also we have in Deuteronomy: "If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong, the Judges shall make diligent enquiry; and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother, then shall ye do unto him as he had thought to have done unto his brother; and those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such

“ Such evil among you : And thine eye shall not
“ pity ; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth
“ for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” Here
then we may observe,

First, That considering the case before us, and the passages just cited, it was a law given only to the Magistrate : It was a direction to him what to do, when such a cause came before him ; in what manner he should punish those acts of violence and wrong which were done by one man to another. The execution of this law appertained only to the Judges ; and no private man might then, by virtue of this law, any more than he may now, revenge himself upon any man. But,

When the matter came before the Judge, and he had enquired diligently into the thing, it was then his part and duty, as a Judge, to pass sentence accordingly.

That private men might not take upon themselves thus to revenge the wrongs which were done to them by their neighbours, is evident from those other parts of the same law of Moses which expressly forbid all Revenge :

As particularly that in Leviticus : “ Thou shalt
“ not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the
“ children of thy people.” And,

To the same purpose is this direction given us by Solomon, who, by the expression he uses, one would think, had an eye to the very law before us :

“ Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done
“ to me ; I will render to the man according to
“ his work.”

Secondly, We may further observe, that the reason why this law of retaliation was given to the Jews, was not to gratify a spirit of Revenge in him that had received any hurt or mischief from another, by affording him the malicious pleasure of seeing his adversary suffer the like evil, but it was, that men might be kept from doing injury to their neighbours, by the just fear which this law was proper and likely to work in them, of their suffering the same evil in their own persons which they should at any time do to the person of another ; for, so it is said expressly :

“ And those which shall remain shall hear and
“ fear, and shall from henceforth commit no more
“ any such evil among you.”

Thus this law was given, not to gratify private Revenge, but for the public good ; not indeed so much for the punishment of evil, as for the prevention of it.

All therefore (I suppose) that was meant by our Saviour, in His quotation of the passages before cited, was,

First, That men should not by themselves revenge those injuries which had been done to them by others.

This

This was not permitted even by the Jewish Law, much less is it permitted by the Christian. And,

Secondly, That we should not seek Revenge, even at the hand of a Magistrate, out of a spirit of Revenge, when moved thereto by hatred and ill-will to the person who hath wronged us, and only through a desire to please and gratify our own revengeful minds, by putting our neighbour to the same pain and loss which we ourselves have before suffered by his injustice.

Under the Jewish Law, indeed, men were allowed, yea, permitted to take Revenge upon their enemies by the hand of a Magistrate, in order purely to prevent their taking Revenge upon them by their own hands. But,

The Christian religion, which designs us for greater perfection and purity, will not allow us to avenge ourselves any way, neither by ourselves nor by the Magistrate, when we know, beforehand, that the only effect will be, that our neighbour will be made to suffer pain and loss for the hurt he hath done us, without any amends to ourselves, or reparation for the damage we have sustained by his means.

“Recompence to no man therefore evil for evil.”

“See that no man render evil for evil unto any man. Yea,

“Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath.”

How instructive and winning is the example of God in the case before us ! Should the Almighty deal with us, in this respect, as we are but too apt to deal with one another, the very supposition of such a procedure might justly make us tremble !

When men are so daringly wicked that one might not unreasonably expect God to "dash them " to pieces, in a moment, like a potter's vessel," yet is " He still slow to anger, and of great kindness," and mercifully waits their coming to a better mind.

Shall " the High and Lofty One," then, " who " inhabiteth eternity," vouchsafe to set a pattern of gentleness and patience, and " man, that is a " worm," refuse to follow it ?—Strange contemplation, indeed, that severity, which is God's " strange work," should be man's delight.

As the example of God thus teaches us to forego Revenge, so no less the ill consequences of the sin itself.

The consequences of this passion commonly prove very prejudicial to ourselves ; it being that which leads us into the greatest disorders, and sometimes hurries us into the most flagitious crimes ; for, the passion of Revenge is not so much to be considered as a single passion, but as a train to every disorder in the human frame. Yea,

How naturally doth the Revenge of one injury draw on more ; in the revenging of which a perpetual

perpetual and endless circulation of injuries and Revenges must ensue ; So that whoever seeks Revenge upon another commonly in the issue takes it upon himself. It is the Apostle's advice, " If " ye bite and devour one another, take heed that " ye be not confumed one of another."

This is but the least ill consequence attending it: Crimes of the deepest dye, and (if the most lasting repentance should not ensue) death eternal are its dire concomitants. In a word:

If we are not to be prevailed upon by any means to forego revenge, we have no other choice left us (according to the terms of the Gospel) but of resolving either to do it, or of perishing everlasting; for, we are hereby disqualified from all religion, and the forgiveness of our own sins.

To what hath been said I shall add the ever-memorable words of the Son of Sirach :

" He that revengeth shall find vengeance from
" the Lord, and he will surely keep his sins in
" remembrance. One man beareth hatred against
" another, and doth he seek pardon from the
" Lord? He sheweth no mercy to man, who is
" like himself; and doth he ask forgiveness of his
" own sins?" Yea,

" If he that is but flesh, nourish hatred, who will
" intreat for pardon for him?" None surely. But,

As he lieth down in hatred, so iniquity will cover him, and he shall find vengeance from the Lord, and both God and man will effectually

humble him ; for, as are his ways, so will it be dealt out unto him. To conclude :

“ The root of Revenge is in the weakness of the soul ; the most abject and timorous are the most addicted to it.

“ As the tempest and the thunder affect not the sun, or the stars, but spend their fury on things below, so injuries ascend not to the souls of the great, but waste themselves on such as are those who offer them.

“ Poorness of spirit will actuate revenge : Greatness of soul despiseth the offence.

“ Why seekest thou vengeance, O man ? — with what purpose is it that thou pursuest it ? Thinkest thou to gain thine adversary ? — know, that thyself feelest its greatest torments.

“ It is unjust in the anguish it inflicts ; therefore nature intended it not for thee : Needeth he who is injured more pain ? — or ought he to add force to the affliction which another hath cast upon him ?

“ Revenge is painful in the intent, and it is dangerous in the execution : Whilst the vengeful seeketh his enemy’s hurt, he oftentimes procureth his own destruction.

“ Can the death of thine adversary satiate thy hatred ? Can the setting him at rest restore thy peace ?

“ Wouldst thou make him sorry for his offence, conquer him, and spare him ; for in death he owneth

“ owneth not thy superiority ; nor feeleth he any
“ more the power of thy wrath.

“ There is nothing so easy as to revenge an offence ; but nothing is so honourable as to pardon it.

“ The greatest victory a man can obtain is over
“ himself : He that disdaineth to feel an injury,
“ retorteth it upon him who offereth it.

“ When thou meditatest Revenge, thou confessest that thou feelest the wrong : When thou complainest, thou acknowledgest thyself hurt by
“ it : Meanest thou to add this triumph to the
“ pride of thine enemy ?

“ If thou think it dishonourable to bear an offence,
“ more is in thy power ; thou mayest conquer it.

“ Good offices will make a man ashamed to be
“ thine enemy : Greatness of soul will terrify him
“ from the thought of hurting thee.

“ The greater the wrong, the more glory is in
“ pardoning it ; and by how much more justifiable
“ would be Revenge, by so much the more honour
“ there is in clemency.

“ Hast thou a right to be a judge in thine own
“ cause ? — to be a party in the act, and yet to pronounce sentence on it ? Before thou condemnest, let another say it is just.

“ The revengeful is feared, and therefore he is
“ hated ; but he that is endued with clemency is
“ adored : The praise of his actions remaineth for
“ ever ; and the love of the world attendeth him.”

SERMON

SERMON LIV.

Of forgiving Injuries, in Opposition to Revenge.

LUKE xvi. 37. “*Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*”

IT hath been disputed, whether the forgiving of Injuries be a duty of natural religion, or only of positive institution.

That it doth not arise from any clear or evident principles of natural reason, is argued from the writings of the Heathen moralists; yea, the greatest authorities among them are particularly cited to prove, that tamely to put up with insults is so far from being a matter of moral obligation, that it is an argument of a mean and narrow soul, and contrary to the great fundamental law of self-preservation. For,

Though we meet with many sayings upon clemency in the works of the more celebrated Heathen authors, yet, they speak of it rather as an heroic virtue, which glitters in the eyes of the world, than

than as a duty of strict morality: They considered it as a general and commendable thing on some occasions to pardon an offence, but what upon no occasion any person was really obliged to perform.

This defect which we find in the Heathen system, Christianity abundantly supplies, in giving us the most just and refined sentiments of the duty before us, and such as are exactly agreeable to the reasonableness of the thing itself. But,

Because we do not always follow either authority or reason as we ought, without some further prospect, our blessed Saviour is here pleased to encourage our obedience to this command of his, of pardoning the offences of other men against us, by a most gracious promise that this will be a means of procuring the pardon of our own offences against God: " Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."

" The reasonableness of the thing itself, and the advantages which will flow from the disposition before us, are the arguments whereby I shall enforce the duty here enjoined us.

First, Of the reasonableness of it:

This I shall make appear from the following considerations, (viz.) as it is an act of prudence, of goodness, and justice.

We have already seen (under a preceding article) the many inconveniencies in which revenge involves us; and therefore a temper of mind which frees us from all the ill and natural effects of a revengeful

revengeful temper (as the spirit of Forgiveness doth) cannot but for that reason have an intrinsic virtue and excellency in it; consequently, the height of prudence must be in the exercise of it, especially if we add to this the opposite advantages which will accrue to us herefrom, (viz.) the reconciling of enemies, the love of God and of our brethren on this account, and, of course, the blessing of the one, and the favour of the other, at all times upon us.

This duty therefore is one of the noble refinements which Christianity has made upon the general maxims and practice of mankind; and enforced, with a peculiar strength and beauty, by sanctions no less alluring than awful. Indeed, the practice of it (as we here see) is generally its own reward, by expelling from the mind the most troublesome intruders upon its repose, (viz.) every rancorous passion of resentment, and giving us, in its stead, the favour both of God and man. But,

Whether our enemies are to be softened by this method, or not, it is certainly a more prudent way to try it than to provoke them to new injuries, by doing them all the ill offices in our power. Yea,

“ Restrain the resentment arising from the injuries of unreasonable men. Thy adversary shall praise thy mild forbearance, and thy Forgiveness of a brother’s trespasses be requited by the more important pardon of thine own offences against the tremendous Majesty of Heaven.”

Secondly,

Secondly, To forgive, is an act of goodness, than which there is nothing in human nature more amiable or praise-worthy. Now,

It is needless to prove, that if to do good in general be a perfection of human nature, a good action changes not its quality, when it is done to an enemy—No: This, in the concurrent sense of all mankind, has ever been looked upon as the very perfection of goodness itself, (viz.) to do kindness, not only against merit, but even in despite of provocation. But further:

To forgive, is an act of justice: Every member of society hath an undeniable interest in the laws of the Constitution, which were designed to protect all men from injury and insult; whoever therefore complies with these, acts in that justice of character wherein he stands engaged by the laws of the land.

Thus prudent and pious, thus just and equitable is the duty before us! No marvel then that we find it so strictly enjoined us, and eminently displayed in the chief of all characters, Christ himself.

How express to this purpose is the example of the Almighty!—who, though He “is able to destroy,” yet, “is mighty to save.” Yea,

These are the terms wherein He is pleased to speak of his goodness, that He is “slow to anger, “ and full of compassion”—that He is “patient “ and long-suffering”—that He will be “merciful “ to

“ to our transgressions”—and that He will “ remember our sins and iniquities no more.”

Had not that all-glorious Being, who “ is good, and doth good,” recommended His pardoning goodness particularly to our imitation, yet, this being one of the moral and communicable attributes of his divine nature, the very reason of the thing shews that we ought to imitate it, and look upon it, not only as our duty, but as one of our greatest perfections to do it, as our Saviour argues in a most admirable and persuasive manner: “ But I say unto you, love your enemies : Bless them that curse you ; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven : for, He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust ; for, if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ? Do not even the Publicans the same ? And, if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others ? Do not even the Publicans so ? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in Heaven, is perfect.”

From His tender mercy therefore let us also learn to be merciful. Yea,

Surely, most unworthy shall we be thought of God’s Forgiveness, if we, in our hearts, forgive not ;

not ; if we presume to hope for pardon of our own faults, and yet indulge ourselves in an unforgiving, unrelenting temper. God allows us not to expect, nor even to ask Forgiveness upon any other terms than our forgiving them that trespass against us ; neither doth He permit us to set bounds to it, or to say, thus far will I pardon, and no further ; no : for He saith not unto us “ until seven times, but “ until seventy times seven ;” (i. e.) as oft as he shall offend, and repent, and turn unto us.

Do we think this too much ; or forget that we have been thus dealt with ourselves ?

“ Were God extreme to mark what is done “ amiss,” where among us all is the man that would “ be able to abide it ? ” Behold, our common Lord and Master vouchsafes to set us the example ! “ ought we not then to have compassion on our “ fellow-servants, even as He hath pity on us ; ” and, instead of anger and revenge, to be “ full of “ tender-mercy and loving-kindness ? ” Yea, what is that objection which the consideration of our offended and merciful God’s example shall not silence ?

All our unworthiness could not provoke Him to abandon us, nor induce Him to withdraw his affection from us. Having made us before our request, and preserved us beyond our desert ; yea, and after all this, when we, in despite of his favours to us, by transgression fell, He sent no less

a person to our rescue than his only-begotten Son to redeem us, who was content to empty himself of his ineffable glories which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world, and to suffer death and shame for us, unworthy as we are of the least of all his mercies. Now,

After this, what provocation shall be thought sufficient to exclude them from our affection?

Are they enemies?—so were we.

Are they ungrateful?—so were we.

Are they unworthy of all favour?—we were so in a much greater degree. In a word:

To love and to do good to them who deserve it not at our hands, is the nearest imitation of the goodness of God which we can possibly arrive at.

It is but to think of our own trespasses and offences, therefore, and the multitude of provocations wherewith we have provoked the Almighty, and his plenteous redemption and mercy towards us; and then, “let us bear malice if we can.” But further:

Besides what hath been already alledged in favour of the duty before us, there are not wanting other considerations also more powerfully to induce us hereto; inasmuch as it is the badge of our profession, as Christians, the peace and happiness of society, and an indispensable condition of our own Forgiveness.

First,

First, Because it is the badge of our profession, as Christians ; the precept which distinguishes us and our religion from all others that were ever taught or practised in the world.

That which was said by the Jews of old time, “ thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy,” was said also by all nations and ages, and was never contradicted 'till our Lord appeared, and commanded us to love our enemies :

“ But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.” This was a new strain of benevolence to mankind that was never reached by any other teacher. Morality was never raised to such a height as this by the greatest masters of reason that had appeared before for the benefit and instruction of the world. It is a doctrine which bears the marks of its divine Original, and which never could have been revealed and made known on earth, but “ by the Son of Man who came down from Heaven :” And yet, since it has been revealed by Him, it appears every way worthy of its author. There is something in the notion of it so magnificent and sublime, and in the practice thereof so great and generous, that there is an heroism in performing it. There is a greatness of mind in forgiving enemies far above the greatest and most renowned achievements of those who

have filled the world with the fame of their actions and victories, their exploits and triumphs: Therefore, a great mind should be moved to the practice of it, if for no other reason, yet at least for this, that it is an excellent and praise-worthy virtue: That to conquer ourselves, to subdue our anger, and get the better of a malicious, revengeful temper, is not only the duty of a Christian, as such, but, in truth, the greatest action, the most laudable ambition, and most excellent of all virtues. In a word:

In taking revenge we are on an equal footing only with our enemy, but in passing it over we are superior; for, "it is only a prince's part to pardon, " and the glory of a man to pass over a transgression."

Secondly, To forgive, is the best way whereby to secure and promote the peace and happiness of society.

This is indeed a worldly motive; but, withal, is a motive which the Scripture offers, and one would think it should have a great influence on our hearts.

"If thine enemy hunger (says the Apostle) feed him: If he thirst, give him drink; for, in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." "Coals of fire," not to waste and consume him, but to melt him into love, tenderness, and compassion. For,

Gentle

Gentle treatment to those who deserve ill at our hands is what no one can withstand.

To return good for evil then is not only Christian-like, but also a most happy temper, as keeping us at a distance from every disorder.

Whilst men exist there will always be complaints of slights and indignities, of injuries, and ill-offices that are offered by one to another. And,

So long as they are resented, and made matter of contention, there can be no such thing as good-will in the world: New matter of complaint will be constantly administered, and we shall be embroiled all the day long.

Thus, as revenge is the ferment of nature, and bane of society, so the virtus before us is the cement of love, and the guardian of our peace. Yea,

He that forgiveth, is himself forgiven; and in the end "his very enemis will be at peace with him." So that, if not for others' sake, yet for our own we should be patient towards all men, "love our enemies, and do good to them that hate us;" because, to be thus affected towards all men is as great a kindness to ourselves, as it is charity to others. But further:

The due discharge of the duty before us is not only necessary to our present happiness, but also to our future Forgiveness.

This we observe generally in the present dispensation of things, (viz.) that men are more

readily forgiven, than those who themselves are of a forgiving temper ; and, contrarywise, that the offences of the unforgiving and relentless are as constantly had in remembrance before all men ; and they are seldom, if ever, done away. But,

However this be among men, God hath absolutely assured us, that this shall be the method of his proceedings with us ; and that we shall have judgment without mercy, if we ourselves shew no mercy.

This consideration lays so powerful an engagement upon us to this duty, that if we have the least sense of religion, or any fear of God before our eyes, we cannot dispense with ourselves in the breach of it. It is this only that qualifies us aright for the due discharge of every duty of religion ; without it we are worse than nothing ; our very prayers are but hypocrisy ; yea, rather, a deprecating vengeance upon ourselves, as we are taught in that divine form of prayer given us by our blessed Lord and Saviour himself, who again expressly repeats it : “ If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive yours.”

After what manner, and with how sincere a disposition we ought to forgive, He takes occasion to observe, from the condemnation of that wicked and insensible wretch who shewed no compassion to his fellow-servant, “ So likewise (says He) shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from

“ your

“ your hearts forgive not every one his brother
“ their trespasses.”

Forgiveness of Injuries then is an indispensable duty; is what we pray to God for ourselves, and is therefore what we ought to shew to others: He that does less, whatever he may think, or however he may abound in any other virtue, may be assured, that he never will be forgiven.

It is what our Lord himself expressly assures us: “ If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.”

One would think, that such a positive and express assertion, from the mouth of our blessed Saviour (which, I believe, is as well known, and as generally understood, as any other in the whole word of God) might discourage us from all methods of prosecuting our revenge, without any other argument to enforce it: Indeed, if the fear of God’s vengeance on our sins will not move us to be more charitable to others, it is not to be expected that the reason of the thing should have any influence or effect upon us. In a word:

If we are not to be prevailed upon by any of the foregoing considerations to the practice of the duty before us, we have no other choice left us, according to the terms of the Gospel, but of resolving either to do it, or of perishing everlastinglly; for

for then only is mercy from God to us, when we are plenteous in redemption to the offences of our brethren; yea, herein it is that He stands engaged: “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.”

“Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven;” (i. e.) hereby only it is that we shall become qualified, and capable of His Forgiveness.

Who then can have any ease in a state of enmity, and is conscious at the same time that by his enmity to his fellow-creature he is at enmity “with Him that made him?”—that he is exposed to God’s wrath, and incapable of pardon; is in the “gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity;” and that as often as he prays (by our Lord’s command), he prays that vengeance may be executed upon himself, and that he may suffer the full punishment of all his sins.

Whereas, by resolving to forgive our enemies, we do all that in us lies to promote “peace on earth, and good-will among men;” and, of course, are at peace with God, with ourselves, with our brethren around us, and, which is the happiest consequence of all, are certain of eternal rest hereafter.

Before I dismiss this discourse, it may be necessary to obviate an objection which hath been raised against it.

It is said, that where we sincerely and truly pardon an offence, we are understood as so reconciled

to the party who gave it, as if he had never offended at all ; (i. e.) that those who have proved false and unfaithful to us ought, upon our pardoning them (which we must always do) to be admitted into the same share in our friendship and confidence which they formerly had. This (say they) seems to be a very unreasonable condition of forgiving our false friends, who are generally our worst and most dangerous enemies :

Because, however we may be obliged in prudence, charity, or justice to forbear all acts of revenge against them, and pay them the common duties of humanity, yet, acts of mere favour being arbitrary, and depending wholly on our own choice, why should we be under an obligation to put those who have already abused them into a yet further capacity of betraying us ?

In answer hereto, we say, That as revealed religion hath imposed no duty on us but what is under the regulation of prudence, these, and the like words, are therefore so to be explained as importing no more, than that an offender, upon his repentance, shall be admitted to all those testimonies of love and respect which do not, by reasonable construction, expose us to fresh and further insults.

As to the nature then and measure of the friendly offices we do them, much seems to be left to our own discretion, according to the good qualities

we discover in them, and the different assurances we have of their future fidelity and good behaviour.

This, I conceive, is all that our blessed Saviour can be supposed to intend in the divers expressions in holy Writ enforcing this duty; except his holy religion could be thought to destroy all the rules of moral prudence, contrary to what the Scriptures themselves teach, when they require us to unite "the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove;" and make it the character of a wise man, by a prudent foresight of any evil, to apply the proper means of preventing it.

In a word: How diffusive soever our charity may be to our enemies, to our false friends, or lapsed favourites, yet, it cannot be extended so far as again to make them masters over us to our hurt: We are to love and to do them good; and to receive them to favour so far as not to forget the natural rights we owe to ourselves.

However, "at no time rendering evil for evil, " nor railing for railing, but contrarywise blessing, "and overcoming (if possible) all evil with good;" "being kindly affectionate one towards another; "in honour preferring one another, tender-hearted, "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, "even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us."

"Be more ready then to acknowledge a benefit than to revenge an injury, so shalt thou have more benefits than injuries done unto thee.

"Be

“ Be always more ready to forgive than to return an injury : He that watches an opportunity of revenge lieth in wait against himself, and draweth down mischief on his own head.

“ Harbour not revenge in thy breast ; it will torment thy heart, and discolour its best inclinations.

“ The prudent man forgiveth the injuries of men ; he wipeth them from his remembrance ; revenge and malice have no place in his heart.

“ For evil he returneth not evil ; he hateth not even his enemies, but requiteth their injustice with friendly admonition.

“ He promoteth in his neighbourhood peace and good-will, and his name is repeated with praise and benedictions ; the praise of it endureth for ever.”

S E R M O N L V.

Against Pride.

JAMES iv. 6. “*God refilleth the proud.*”

THE most fatal, and perhaps the corruption that sticks closest to our nature, is Pride; than which there is not, in all the catalogue of vices, any more deservedly hateful to God, more injurious to men, or more prejudicial to ourselves; and therefore fit, above all others, to be discountenanced by us.

The inspired writers, conscious of its danger, do almost every where set themselves, with more than ordinary vehemence, to beat it down in their converts. And,

Considering the nature of man, his short duration, and scanty perfections, together with the evils of self-conceit, the inference is truly unavoidable, that “Pride was not made for man, nor *“an haughty spirit for him that is born of woman.”*

Many

Many and various are the reasons to be given, not only from the folly, but also from the danger and evil tendencies of it, why we should avoid it.

It is without foundation ; it is devoid of its intended effect ; it is an injury to itself, to God, and to mankind in general ; and therefore is justly resisted by all, and will assuredly, in the end, bring us into condemnation.

First, It is without foundation.

We have all of us so many blots in our characters, so many infirmities to acknowledge, so many sins and follies to answer for, that it may seem strange how Pride could ever steal into our hearts, or even to our weakest thoughts.

If angels might be dazzled with the lustre of their own perfections, yet surely this is not the case of man.

Can Pride kindle in corruption, or the flame of ambition in sinful dust and ashes ?

As to the benefits, whether of nature, of fortune, or grace, what is there in any of them wherein to glory ? Are they not all gifts and graces bestowed upon us for different purposes than pride and ostentation ; and rather minister occasion for humility, thankfulness, and all imaginable care, to answer the purposes for which they were intrusted to us, than for vanity and self-conceit ?

If we consider the benefits of nature, by which
VOL. IV. T I mean

I mean beauty, strength, wit, and the like, what is there in any of these whereof to be conceited ?

Not but that sometimes we are mistaken even in these ; and then surely there cannot be a more ridiculous folly than to glory where there is no occasion of boasting. We may also add, that this is not seldom : A man's own judgment of himself being, of all others, the most treacherous. But,

Supposing that our judgment be always right, yet, what is there in any of these natural endowments whereof to glory; there being scarce any of them which some creature or other* hath not in a greater degree than man ?

How much doth the whiteness of the lilly and the redness of the rose surpass the beauty of our countenance !

What multitudes of creatures are there that far surpass man in strength and swiftness !

And divers others, which (as far as concerns any useful end of theirs) act much more wisely than most of us, and are therefore, in Scripture, oftentimes proposed to us by way of example.

Shall we then glory in those things wherein the plants of the earth, and the beasts of the field, do in common partake with us ; yea, and in many things excel us ? But,

Supposing

* Nos Lepus auditu, Lynx visu, Simia gustu,
Vultur adoratu, præcellit Aranea jactu.

Supposing them ever so excellent, yet, they are not always durable, neither did man of himself procure them at any time; and, surely, what he neither got, nor can retain, it is truly folly for him to value himself upon.

As to the benefits of fortune, by which are meant wealth, honour, and the like, they also are uncertain, and of equal donation; neither of themselves do they add real worth to any man.*

We have them all of us but as stewards; and should therefore rather think how to make up our accounts, than pride ourselves in our receipts.

As to the benefits of grace, by which I mean virtue, and knowledge in righteousness, these, tho' truly excellent and valuable, as being infinitely more precious than all the world, yet, nevertheless, to be conceited of, and pride ourselves in them, is the height of folly and madness; because, these also, like the others, are equally the gift of God; and, by thus doing, by priding ourselves of grace, we shall most assuredly lose the means of glory; for, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

"Where then is cause of boasting?" It is excluded. For,

God is not only the giver, but also preserver of all these blessings to us: "Let not the wise man then glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man in

T 2 " his

* See Vol. I. page 218.

“ his strength, nor the rich man in his riches ;” for, whatever our accomplishments or acquisitions may be, they are all from God, “ who is the Author “ and Giver of every good and perfect gift ;” therefore, “ let him that glorieth, glory in the “ Lord.”

Pride is not only without foundation, but is devoid also of the end it aims at.

All other vices do, in some measure, attain their end ; but pride and insolence, and contempt of others, do infallibly defeat their own design : They aim at respect and esteem, but never attain it ; for, all mankind naturally hate them. But further :

Pride is an injury to ourselves ; and that, not only on account of the contempt we hereby meet with from others, but also by reason of the many evils it brings along with it.

Pride makes men foolish and void of caution ; negligent of the present, and improvident for the future ; both which naturally lead to distress, agreeable to the expression of the wise man : “ When “ Pride cometh, then cometh shame ; but with “ the lowly is wisdom ;” and, “ before destruction “ goeth pride, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

As humility is the root of all virtue, so is pride the fountain of all vice : “ The wicked (saith the “ Psalmist) is so proud that he careth not for God, “ neither is God in all his thoughts ;” being self-conceited,

conceited, high-minded, insolent, and vain; and, when men are once come to this, they are prepared for the commission of all sins.

I might instance a multitude of particular sins that naturally flow from this of Pride:

Anger, which the wise man sets as the effect of Pride, calling it "proud wrath:" Strife and contention he again observes to be the offspring of it, "only by Pride cometh contention."

It was Pride that first brought rebellion and strife into Heaven, and cast down the apostate angels thence, who affected to be equal, nay superior to God their Creator.

It is this which inspires obstinacy and contempt of the same God in every presumptuous offender.

Nor is this the seed of all malicious wickedness only; it poisons and blasts our righteousness itself, stains all its beauty, and looseth its whole reward.

It were infinite to mention all the fruits of this bitter root:

I shall name but one more, (viz.) that Pride not only betrays us into many sins, but also makes them incurable in us: "By Pride only it is that "the mind is withheld from knowledge;" for, it refuseth instruction out of a vain-conceit that it needeth it not; being "wise in his own eyes, and "good in his own sight." All his faults are hereby covered, and a veil is drawn before all his weaknesses and wants; consequently, he is pre-

vented from all repentance, and every improvement. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit, "there is more hope of a fool than of him ;" and that for the reasons already mentioned. But further :

Not only to ourselves, but to God also is an injury hereby done.

Every proud man robs God of the honour due to his providence and grace, erects new altars to strange deities, and, by the wildest of all idolatry, burns incense to himself.

So boldly doth he encroach upon, and highly provoke, the jealousy of Him who solemnly declares, that "he will not give his glory to another."

No marvel then that God should, in express terms, declare by his Prophets that he will resist it :

"God resisteth the proud."

There are many, it is to be feared, who are afflicted and distressed hereby, who little think from whence the curse and secret canker came.

And, how should it be otherwise ?—will God, suppose ye, coincide with those who set themselves up in opposition to him ? Yea, rather,

Is it not said, that "they are an abomination to him ;" that "He beholdeth them afar off," in order to hasten their punishment ; and that, because "He cannot away with it," but will bring down "their high looks even to the ground."

Not

Not only to ourselves, and to God, the supreme Author of all things, but, to mankind in general are we hereby transgressors.

Upon our fellow-creatures Pride is an insufferable encroachment; for it renders men haughty and assuming, perverse and troublesome, neither “condescend they to men of low estate;” therefore, where this prevails, “there also is error and “confusion, yea, strife, and every evil work.”

It naturally follows, in truth and righteousness, that where by Pride the order of the creation is inverted, the harmony of the world disturbed, and the appointments of Heaven resisted, both God and man will resist, and, in time, effectually humble it.

What remains is to lay before you a few cautions whereby to avoid it. And here,

If our civil stations, or religious advantages and improvements, tempt us to a proud and haughty behaviour, or to judge and despise our weak brother, we should do well to consider whence it is that these things come, and “who it is that maketh “thee to differ from another;” and that all the members, whether of Christ, or the body politic, are all of them useful in their several stations; so that we can none of us say, “we have no need “one of another;” nay, the highest and greatest would be nothing without their vassals of support. Yea,

“God

“God accepteth not the persons of Princes,”
“nor regardeth the rich more than the poor; for,
“they are all the workmanship of His hands.”
Let us also think upon the vanity and uncertainty
of those things which so elate us with pride;
that if we are placed in high stations, we have then
larger accounts to give to God; that it will not
be long before death and judgment will level all
worldly distinctions, when men will be distin-
guished only by their good works, and not by the
loftiness of their pride and arrogance; and, that
then they will be entirely confounded, or perhaps
placed beneath those whom they now despise; as
their earthly inferiors have been superior to them
in heavenly goodness.

The greatest, the most eminently pious men,
have been remarkably humble in this respect:

Holy Job refused to “justify himself before God:”

Abraham styled himself “dust and ashes.”

Jacob acknowledges that “he is less than the
“least of all God’s mercies:” And,

St. Paul calls himself “the least of all saints.”

Where then are our boasted eminencies before
these men that we have whereof to glory?

Lastly, If none of the foregoing considerations
can abate our Pride, let us consider, whenever we
are tempted hereto, that “there is a higher than
“the highest” of us all, who certainly regards,
and will resist us; and “though hand join in hand
“we shall not be unpunished.”

We

We have a remarkable proof of this in the story of Nebuchadnezzar, who, though a King, and the greatest in the world, yet, for his Pride, was driven from among men, and fed even with the brute creation. And,

Is it not most frequently seen, that this vice meets with very extraordinary punishments, even in this world ; but, if it should not, yet, let not the proud man think that he hath therefore escaped the just judgment of God.

It is certain, that there will be a most severe account taken of it hereafter ; for, if God spared not the Angels for this sin, but cast them into Hell, let no man, big with the same vice, hope to escape better.

“ Let us not then think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the proportion of faith ;” and, “ be not wise in your own conceits.”

“ Exalt not thyself then to the Heavens ; for, lo, the Angels are above thee : nor disdain thy fellow inhabitants of the earth, for that they are beneath thee. Are they not the work of the same hand ?

“ For, as the tulip that is gaudy without smell, and conspicuous without use, so is the man who setteth himself up on high, and hath not merit.

“ What will Pride profit him ; or what will his vaunting bring unto him ?”

SERMON

SERMON LVI.

On Humility, the Opposite of Pride.

I. PETER v. 5. “Be cloathed with Humility.”

HUMILITY and meekness, and a due diffidence of our own perfections, take the first place in the number of Christian graces; yea, and so necessary is it, and essential to the being of a Christian, that it is impossible to make the very first advances in the religion of Christ without it; and that, not only on account of its excellency, but also of its usefulness towards obtaining all the rest. For,

The man who is of a “haughty spirit,” and “wise in his own eyes,” bids the fairest of any man to banish from him the presence of God; and, as to other instructions, he knows too well to be advised of any; therefore, is most likely to run counter, not only to religion, but even also to the common offices of civility:

“Beware therefore above all things; and be “cloathed with Humility.”

In

In discoursing further to this subject, I shall follow the usual method of treating upon moral virtues, and shall consider,

First, The nature and effects of it. And then,
Secondly, The proper motives and inducements thereto.

As to the nature and effects of Humility, I shall represent it in these three views, (viz.)

As it respects our duty to God ; relates to ourselves ; and influences our conduct towards our neighbour. In each of which there are, and have been, great and frequent abuses : The extremes are to be avoided.

First, Of the effects which Humility produceth towards God.

That God is most just and holy, and that we are sinners, even the very best of us, are truths which ought to be strongly impressed in us. But here we may form too abject an opinion of ourselves, and give to God too severe and inexorable austerity.

That God requires more than we can do, and that He will not shrink therefrom, are notions that have, in a greater or lesser degree, possessed the minds of many ; and have overwhelmed them with dread and horror of God, and filled their devotion with superstition, and uncommanded austerities.

This is not Humility ; but ignorance, abject fear, and religious melancholy. True and rational Humility, as it influences our behaviour towards

towards our Maker, produces a religious awe, and banishes presumption, carelessness, and vain glory.

The humble person, considering the perfections of God, and comparing them with his own imperfections, approaches Him with reverence and awful submission, acknowledging God's greatness, and his own unworthiness; and, consequently, receives all things from Him with resignation; His favours with due thankfulness and gratitude, and His frowns as corrections for their future amendment.

Secondly, Humility, as it relates to our own private thoughts and judgments, and is confined to ourselves, requires that we should entertain no better opinion of ourselves than we deserve.

To judge too harshly and severely of ourselves, and to fancy that we are guilty of faults from which we are free, cannot be acts of Humility, because, there can be no virtue in mistake and ignorance. Only,

As we have all of us a propensity to lessen our defects, and to over-rate our good deeds, it is safest to err on the other side, and to correct this bent, by forcing the mind somewhat towards the contrary way, and frequently to review our failings, and the many causes which we have of rejecting all arrogant and conceited thoughts.

Our Maker hath conferred upon us several gifts, which we cannot value too much as long as we acknowledge

acknowledge them to come from Him, and endeavour to use them rightly. It shews ingratitude and ill-nature to lessen and undervalue the benefits which we receive from our friends. And,

To behave in this manner towards God is still more blameable. Therefore,

To form mean and despicable opinions of ourselves in particular, and of human nature in general, cannot be found judgment, modesty, or goodness of any sort, but error and ignorance, malevolence, and depravity of heart. Besides,

They who have too mean an opinion of their own abilities, and fancy themselves to be useless, do many times really become so, and dare not attempt many things, in which they are capable of succeeding, and which they ought to perform.

This behaviour arises more from indolence or melancholy, than from humility. For,

Humility, as it relates to the judgment which we are to form concerning ourselves, is a due sense of our imperfections ; of those which are common to our nature, and of those which are peculiarly our own.

The imperfections common to human nature are these, (viz.) mortality, occasioned by sin, and all the evil consequences attending it, as weakness and frailty, disorders and diseases of the body, which, as it is united to the soul, hath a great

influence upon its operations, and often proves an impediment to its progress in wisdom and goodness:

A strong propensity to evil more than to good, which all men, at certain times, and on certain occasions, have experienced:

An understanding liable to be frequently deceived; and a knowledge, which, at best, is much confined.

The infirmities peculiar to ourselves are those defects, either in goodness or knowledge, by which we are inferior to our brethren around us.

To be sensible of these weaknesses and faults is Humility, as it respects ourselves; and to lessen and overlook them is pride and presumption.

As to the effects which Humility produceth in our behaviour towards men, here also the same distinction is to be observed, (viz.) that there is a deceitful and false Humility which ought to be avoided.

Thus some speak contemptibly of themselves, and pretend ignorance where they are well skilled, and pay a servile deference to the opinions and directions of others where their own hints might have profited.

Some shun the conversation of their equals, and the habit of their proper station, and chuse companions and dress of the lowest sort, and would therefore fancy themselves to be humble, and would be accounted so by the world. But,

In

In such a conduct there may be no humility nor modesty, but hypocrisy, affectation, and meanness of spirit, mixed with pride and vanity. Now,

Instead of an unmanly contempt and disregard of ourselves, with an abject fear and blind reverence of others, which is one extreme ; and a proud, conceited, overbearing insolence, which is the other ; true Humility proceeds always uniform and decent “ in that state of life in which it “ hath pleased God to call us.”

The nature of Humility being thus stated, I shall proceed,

Secondly, To consider the motives to the practice hereof. And here,

The example of our Saviour is an example of every virtue, particularly of Humility. He himself calls upon us to observe and imitate it ; to come and learn of Him to “ be meek and lowly in “ heart ;” to be patient, calm, and condescending ; and assures us from thence, that we “ shall find “ rest unto our souls.” And,

Shall so instructing, so winning an example, backed also with so much interest in our behalf, be without its proper influence upon us ?

If we call ourselves his disciples, then, let the Humility of our Master correct the pride and ambition of his servants.

If this divine Person thought it no diminution to his majesty to leave us an example of Humility,

then, let not the great among men think it too much condescension to follow his steps herein.

In all things therefore let us “put on the ornament of a meek and humble spirit, which in the “fight of God is of great price ;” and then Christ will acknowledge us as peculiarly His. But further:

In the behaviour of the Angels, as it is revealed to us in Scripture, we find Humility (that part of it, I mean, which is expressed in condescending to good offices to men) amply extended. They are there styled “ministring spirits to us for good :” When we can give them no return but reverence and gratitude.

Whoever therefore best imitates these holy spirits in Humility and condescension towards his inferiors, approaches nearest to them in dignity ; and whilst he abases himself, his actions exalt him ; and in this the Scriptures are express.

We hereby secure to ourselves the favour of God, and bring down his blessings upon us : “He “that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Again :

“With the lowly is wisdom ; and before honour “is humility :” “Be cloathed therefore with Hu-“mility, for God resisteth the proud, but giveth “grace to the humble,”

From these passages, and many more which might be added, we may observe, that Humility is highly acceptable to God ; in general, because it is a virtue, and in particular, because it disposeth

men

men to receive with modest submission the great truths of religion and instruction, and prepares them for every duty and good office in life: On which account also it gains the esteem and love of all men, and, consequently, if not the conveniencies, at least, the necessaries of life.

Every one who hath but slightly observed what passes in the world must see this. Since all love themselves, they will probably approve and favour those who shew them respect and civility, and do them all good offices in return; yea, the meek and humble provoke no enemy by contempt, none by censure nor envy;

Whereas he who is proud and insolent can neither improve, have friends, nor make any, but lives hating and hateful to all about him.

If none of these considerations can have their just impression on us, yet, let us reflect how much our own happiness depends on this disposition, (viz.)

That Humility keeps all the disquieting passions of nature under government and discipline, arms us against all that can happen from without, and preserves peace and serenity within; is the security of the great, and the support of the needy; it improves every satisfaction of life, and reconciles our patience to all that can befall us. In a word:

It is Humility that forms and improves those graces of religion, and prepares us for that blessed

state from whence malice, faction, envy, and every proud and disquieting thought will be for ever excluded. Yea,

As pride expelled the apostate Angels from the presence of God, and the station they held in his favour, so Humility must qualify us to succeed to the glories from which they fell. To conclude :

A soul, thus resigned, is carried smoothly down the stream of Providence: No temptations disquiet him, no dangers alarm him; but he relies firmly on the skill and affection of God, his governor, who, he knows, will conduct him safely through the troublesome waves of this world, and finally will bring him to the land of everlasting life; for, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the “humble,” and “no good thing will He withhold “from them.”

S E R M O N L V I I .

Against Envy.

I. COR. xiii. 4. “*Charity envieth not.*”

THE sin next in catalogue to pride is Envy, as arising from an aspiring, self-presuming air, and the only effectual antidote against it is charity, which “thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in “iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.”

The many excellent things spoken of charity, and that it is the chief of all virtues, cannot but strongly incline us to cultivate so friendly a disposition, which is the cure of almost every disorder, especially of “Envy, which is the rottenness of the “bones:” “*Charity envieth not.*”

As to the nature of Envy it is too well known to need here any enlargement.

The causes and symptons by which it may be known, its ill effects, and proper remedies, may therefore be rather more profitably insisted on.

As

As to the first of these, it is plainly the effect of a mind wholly set upon the things of this world, and very cold and indifferent to virtue and goodness.

When a person, who hath represented to himself temporal prosperity and pleasure as the only desirable possession, sees others better accommodated than himself, he cannot but look on them with uneasiness and regret.

To this may be added, an high conceit of our own merit and capacity; an opinion that no respect can be too great, or reward too good for us.

In such a depraved state of mind, Envy hath a natural and easy access; and is, for the most part, retentive of it.

Such are its causes; as to its symptoms, they are briefly these, (viz.)

First, It is a shrewd sign of our envying another, when we find ourselves averse from doing him good offices; for, this is a great corruption of nature, which, in its purity, is social and benevolent, and is no less ready than willing to do acts of kindness and good -will; whereas Envy is a narrow, selfish principle, utterly inconsistent with that universal charity which is the first dictate of our uncorrupt nature, and which our blessed Saviour recommends to us as the distinguishing character of his followers.

A second symptom of Envy, and a much surer than the former, is, when we are pleased with the evil of others.

This

This is such a degree of corruption as reverses our whole nature, and renders it the very contrary of what it should be ; yea, and hath this singularity in it, that it hath evil for its object, in an eminent degree, above any other passion whatever.

Even anger, unruly and outrageous as it is, relaxes either by time or satisfaction ; and, for the most part, calms into good-nature and benevolence. Nothing in nature but Envy is steadily and permanently malignant.

Another symptom of Envy is, a censorious disposition, expressing itself either in industriously silencing the good actions of others, or exposing the bad. Indeed,

It seldom rests here, but extends itself even to the doubtful and indifferent, by uncharitable interpretations ; depreciating, by pity, the excellency of others, when attended, as at best it must be, with some imperfection and alloy ; thereby depressing the excellency we seem to admire.

The last symptom of Envy that I shall here mention is, a discontented querulous disposition ; repining at the dispensations of Providence, which but too often degenerates into doubts and despondency, and concludes in the horrors of despair.

Thus much as to the first heads of enquiry.

Secondly, The ill-effects it produceth are many and great.

Solomon

Solomon expressly styles it, "the rottenness of the bones :" "A sound heart (says he) is the life of the flesh, but Envy the rottenness of the bones."

Good-nature operates agreeably both upon the body and soul ; whereas Envy is a leaven that fours and corrupts, and is the direct contradiction to happiness and health ; is the bane of all that is good and beautiful in life ; it inverteth the nature and order of things ; instead of partaking in the common joy of others, and sympathising with their distress, it, contrarywise, "weeps with those that rejoice, and rejoiceth with those that weep."

A secret canker gnaws the heart, and eats into the bones : The mind, meanwhile, is in a perpetual ferment, and restless "like the troubled sea when "it cannot rest." But,

This is not all : The worst effect of Envy is, the influence it hath upon the moral state of the mind. It not only destroys health, but virtue likewise.

All virtue consists in a social disposition : Love and benevolence are the fountains from whence it flows ; therefore, when Envy hath once poisoned the mind with despite, with gall and bitterness, and enmity, may we not justly ask with St. James, "My Brethren, can the same fountain send forth "both sweet water and bitter ?"

Secondly, Another ill effect that Envy hath upon the person possessed by it, is, that it exposeth him

him to the just hatred and aversion of all mankind ; for, “ who is he but will evil requite the envious, “ and render to the spiteful their just deserts ? ” But,

The worst effect of all is, that we are hereby secluded that virtue “ charity, the very bond of all “ perfectness, without which whosoever liveth is “ counted dead before God.”

So that we hereby deprive ourselves at once both of the love of society and the favour of God, and leave ourselves equally detested and despised by both.

The ill effects which this pernicious passion hath upon society are beyond all expression.

“ It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison,” and spreads its malignant influence wherever it comes. “ Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before Envy ? ”

Merit and innocence, the two great securities of peace and happiness, are so far from being shielded against it, that they are the most of all exposed to its malign assaults, and the sure objects of its fiercest vengeance :

Witness, the violence of the sons of Jacob, who could sacrifice their own brother to the jealousy of a dreaded superiority, even in a dream ;

Witness, the implacable malice of Saul against David, the man of all the earth he was most obliged to, who had so often saved him and his kingdom

kingdom from destruction, and was the greatest glory, as well as the greatest security, of his country.

Higher yet ; even the immaculate Lamb, the Lord of life, and Saviour of us all, could not escape it : Witness, the testimony of their own governor, who knew “ that for Envy they had delivered “ him.”

It unhinges all the obligations of gratitude and justice, and changes the very tendency of things : it is conscious of its own malignity ; and therefore it is impossible to relax it by any good offices whatever, because it justly regards all returns of kindness and benevolence to be, as in fact they really are, its greatest reproach. Yea,

And not only this, but it saps also the relish and enjoyment of all our earthly possessions whatever.

Witness, the testimony of Haman, who, thought high in the favour of a monarch, and equal almost in dignity to him, yet, could take no satisfaction from all his surrounding ingredients of felicity, merely through the ill effect of this bitter root : “ All these things (says he) profit me nothing, so “ long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the “ King’s gate.” In a word :

It is, for the most part, to this one fountain, that faction and strife, that murder, hatred, and infamy owe their rise ; therefore it is, that whenever the Apostles speak of it, they never fail to join to it, “ murders, wraths, strifes, malice, evil-
“ speaking,

“ speaking, &c.” to shew, that these are all the natural, and almost unavoidable consequences of that passion.

Thus St. Paul, speaking of the sins of the Gentiles, which were the consequences of their irreligion, mentions, among others, that they were “ full of Envy;” and then immediately subjoins almost every sin of evil fame: Again, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, he connects envyings with almost every sin.

St. Peter also and St. James assure us, that “ where envying is, there also is confusion and “ every evil work.”

Thus much concerning Envy, and envious persons. I shall add a word or two, under this head, concerning those whose lot it is to be envied, on account of their superiority and better success.

It becomes all such so to behave themselves as to give no person cause of dissatisfaction.

Envy is an odious fault; but there is a fault which is worse, and that is, to excite spleen and jealousy by insolence and scorn, by refusing reasonable requests, and to take a detestable pleasure in making another uneasy.

Such have the sins of others to answer for besides their own, and act the part of the great seducer of mankind, by drawing them into temptation.

Envy, it may be said, is a vice; and, consequently, no man ought to envy them, or to say those things of them which Envy suggests.

It is true, and yet it is as true that they deserve such usage, and no pity when they receive it.

The Providence of God permits bad men to punish and plague one another, though both are guilty in his sight. Decency, affability, courtesy, moderation, condescension, and humanity, in words and deeds, should accompany and adorn a prosperous state; consequently, where persons in this state fail hereof, their due consequences are to be expected: But,

If adorning it with these qualifications, and should yet be envied and traduced, they ought to bear it, and probably will, with much patience, as a thing beneath their notice.

Lastly, What remedies there are for the cure of this evil passion: And here,

As Envy generally arises either from the real or supposed want which we see amply supplied in the envied object before us, the best remedy would be diligence; for hereby we shall not only raise ourselves to a state of elevation, but even shut out those repining envious thoughts which are the unhappy offspring of indolence and laziness. We shall hereby not only free ourselves from Envy, but place ourselves, in a manner, above all possible motives and inducements to Envy; yea, perhaps, rise ourselves, so as even to be envied by others.

A second remedy against Envy is, to settle our opinions of things, and to make a right estimate
of

of them : We "call evil good, and good evil," forgetting the measure they are truly stated at in the word of God, which, in fact, is according to the truth and reality of things.

Those who are of an envious disposition always betray an entirely wrong estimate of things, and of human happiness ; and think those things to be which really are not ; I mean, the good things of this life, which are falsely so called, and have been confessed such, even by those who have revelled most in them. Yea,

So far is happiness from being confined to lofty stations, and pompous titles, that perhaps it may be more rarely found in them, than in stations less conspicuous.

Solomon, who enjoyed the whole of his heart's desire, yet, upon experience, pronounced upon all the seeming delights of men, that they are but "vanity ;" yea, and what is worse, in the end, " vexation of spirit."

All the great demands of life are within the compass of a very moderate competency ; and whether more or less would contribute to our greater happiness depends wholly upon the wisdom and virtue of the owner : In the ordinary use of them they seldom serve any higher or nobler purposes than of ministering fuel to all our unruly passions ; and can any man, then, in his senses, repine

that he is freed from the great and sure torments of life?

Add to this, that barely to repine and grieve, and envy the state of others, will in no way better our condition, but add grief to our former troubles. Yea,

The imprudence of a discontented temper is not less visible than its impiety: Fretfulness and Envy are enemies to our repose, and aggravate disappointments and the lesser matters of life into, what they need not otherwise be, real evils. They often defeat their own end, by preventing that advancement which a more “patient continuance “in well-doing” might probably have secured.

Be our allotment then in life what it will, let us learn not only with contentedness to acquiesce therein, but with chearfulness to accommodate ourselves to it; and if, at any time, from a view of the abundance of others, we should be tempted to envy, let us at the same time reflect, that if, for reasons best known to the Almighty, we are withheld from their greatness, we are happily secured from their dangers. But further:

Another remedy for Envy, is, that we endeavour to make a right judgment of our own worth and abilities, and compare them with the condition of other men as impartially as we can; and, if we do this with any degree of equality, we shall find that

that there are others in the world, at least as good, as wise, and valuable, as ourselves.

Perhaps too we shall find, that if merit were the standard of honour and affluence, we ourselves should not abound as much as we do; and that others, who now pay court to us, would be raised to greater heights above us: At least we shall find abundant reason to bless God for the advantages we enjoy, and not repine at the advanced condition of others; but conclude, that the distribution of felicity, is, in reality, infinitely more equal than is imagined; and that it is not poverty or wealth, knowledge or ignorance, honour or obscurity, but, in truth, virtue and vice only that make the great and material difference between the happiness of one man and another.

Another cure of Envy, and what will effectually supersede the necessity of all others, is, to reflect seriously upon the vanity and fading nature of all worldly advantages.

This once considered as it ought, what have we to do in this world but to employ the little time here allowed us in the diligent discharge of our duty "in that state of life in which it hath pleased God to call us;" renouncing all envious reflections and enquiries, all mean and unworthy solicitude about the transient advantages of others; referring, in all humility, both their and our concerns to the good Providence of that God who

debases one and exalts another for wise reasons, though not always known to us.

Lastly, If we find ourselves inclined to censure others, to silence the good, and expose the evil we know of them, we should remember and imitate the goodness of God who takes pleasure in the happiness of his creatures, who knows our infirmities, hath compassion on them, and even overlooks the evil of our doings for the sake of that little portion of good which is in us.

This conduct of the divine mercy and goodness it should be always our earnest care, as it will be always our highest glory and happiness, to imitate; and one signal advantage of it will be this, that then we shall be so far from repining at the good actions and fortunes of others, that we shall even rejoice and share in all their felicity; Not only so, but we shall refine and raise our nature, and be fitted for the society of Heaven; where the servants and saints of God are delighted with their mutual felicity, and where the happiness of each would be exceedingly impaired, if it were not participated by all.

“ If then thou seest good things fall to one who
“ deserveth them, thou wilt rejoice in it; for, virtue
“ is happy in the prosperity of the virtuous.

“ He who rejoiceth in the happiness of another,
“ increaseth by it his own.

“ But

“ But the heart of the envious man is gall ; his
“ tongue spitteth venom ; the success of his neigh-
“ bour breaketh his rest.

“ He sitteth in his cell repining ; and the good
“ that happeneth to another, is to him an evil.

“ Hatred and malice feed upon his heart, and
“ there is no rest in him.

“ He feeleth in his own breast no love of good-
“ ness, and therefore believeth his neighbour is like
“ unto himself.

“ He endeavours to depreciate those that excel
“ him, and putteth an evil interpretation on all
“ their doings.

“ He lieth on the watch, and meditates mis-
“ chief ; but the detestation of man pursueth him :
“ He is crushed as a spider in his own web.”

SERMON LVIII.

On Content, in Opposition to Envy.

PHILIP iv. vi. “ *I have learned, in whatsoever State I am, therewith to be content.*”

THE natural evils of envy are so many, so great, and visible, that whatever can be specified as a remedy against it will doubtless be readily received and duly attended to.

The example of the Apostle before us may be of singular use hereto; as a due attention to it will enable us, with him, “ in all things, through “ Christ strengthening us.”

If we are uneasy, impatient, angry, envious, querulous, and dejected, because we have not the whole of our heart’s desire, we act most absurdly, we add to our misery, we afflict ourselves to no purpose, and are enemies to our repose. For,

“ After all, the Lord is King be we never so impatient, and will do whatsoever pleaseth him.”

If

If all sin be folly, and every bad disposition irrational, discontent is so in a more peculiar manner. Now,

Since this is a very troublesome evil, and makes our condition worse than it otherwise would be, the consideration hereof should dispose us to use our utmost endeavours to overcome it, and attentively to listen to those arguments and considerations which may convince us of the wisdom and profitableness of the contrary temper.

There is no occasion, I presume, to say much in praise of the virtue before us, or to persuade men that it deserves to be sought after, and that they will find their account in it; for, every one is desirous of it, and all agree in allowing it its just value. That which chiefly thwarts us is, its precise import, and true means of acquirement.

Contentment is a virtue of the most benign influence, and of the utmost importance to mankind: It is a virtue of which the Heathen Moralists saw the necessity, and inculcated the practice, though they were unable to urge such motives and arguments as were sufficient to persuade, such as Christianity alone affords to mankind. Though the Stoicks vaunted themselves highly of their self-satisfaction, and absolute sufficiency to their own happiness, yet, what they only boasted, Christianity hath verified in a thousand instances. St. Paul was not the only follower of Jesus who could say

say thus, but numbers, all indeed who have sincerely embraced the religion of Christ can use the same emphatic and blisful terms ; for, they have such lively motives before them as are sufficient to throw contempt on every momentary earthly good or evil, which must necessarily produce a perfect complacency of mind, and an indifference to all things below. Yet,

Contentment is not a total indifference, or an unconcern or insensibility to good or evil : but, on the contrary, is consistent with the highest and most refined feelings ; and only secludes those painful and anxious sensations which are the bane of private felicity, and the greatest indignity to a wise and paternal Providence : It is not a lazy, inactive supineness, but the thorough exertion of our best endeavours, always in submission to the divine will and pleasure,

Contentment is serenity of mind ; is such a disposition as inclines the soul to acquiesce, with complacency, under every disposal of Providence ; to rest satisfied under every event, and to maintain such a sweetness and equality of temper as preserves to the mind its full and proper dominion,

From whence it appears, that Contentment doth not, by any means, peculiarly relate to an inferior and suffering condition of life, but is equally requisite for the enjoyment of every state whatever. But,

As

As it is a virtue of the mind, it is not to be effected or attained by outward operations only, or merely by our own strength :

It is our happiness, therefore, that He who commands this virtue not only sets the example, but also gives us aid, and enables us hereto. This is one of the greatest encouragements to Christians, and is a peculiar recommendation of our most holy religion.

Weakened and impaired as the human powers are, through the original default of our nature, it is in vain that the sublimity of virtue is pointed out to our attainment, when we have neither the strength nor the inclination to gain the arduous summit.

This was one capital defect of the ancient philosophy ; "they saw and approved the right," but had not strength to perform it.

What could Philosophers, or all the united strength of mortals avail ? Who can reach the mind but God only ? He alone who made the heart can influence it.

It is by His assistance only, therefore, that we are enabled to perform all Christian duties, and to excel in every Christian temper.

Without this, we shall fruitlessly endeavour to attain Contentment ; but with it (setting home to the heart the motives and arguments which Christianity offers) we shall soon arrive at the
happy

happy state which St. Paul enjoyed, and "learn," like him, "in whatever state we are, therewith to be content." Which brings me,

Secondly, To the motives and considerations inducing hereto. Now,

These may be drawn from the nature of God, ourselves, and the things around us.

First, With respect to God.

Justice, reason, and gratitude, do all of them mutually conspire to teach us this duty. For,

Is it not just, that he who is the great Lord and possessor of all things should dispense his blessings as He sees fit, and assign to men their station and portion of goods agreeable to his own will and pleasure?—yea, who can complain, when he considers, that all is a free gift from his inexhaustible bounty?—especially if he reflects, that God is no less wise than great, and that his goodness is equal to both; surely it must be just to acquiesce in whatever He does, and to receive with submission and thankfulness whatever He judges proper to bestow. But,

If justice enforces this virtue, how much stronger are our obligations to it from gratitude to that God who hath so freely bestowed upon us, not only our existence, but every temporal gratification, as well as the invaluable power of enjoying life eternal!

If

If we have not all we wish, shall we therefore most unworthily despise all we have, and condemn the goodness which hath vouchsafed so many unmerited favours upon us ?

But further, not only justice and gratitude, but reason also inculcates the same.

Is not God consummate in wisdom, and must he not therefore better discern what is really more for our advantage than we ourselves ?

Is not God goodness and love ? and do not these principles cause him to watch over us for our good ?

Is not God omnipotent and irresistible ? Can we otherwise than obey his pleasure, which must be fulfilled, and submit to his power, which cannot be controuled ?

Thus, with respect to God, justice, gratitude, and reason, unite to teach us contentment.

The same may be learned from a brief consideration of ourselves.

As men and creatures, we are naturally indigent and weak ; we have nothing of our own.

Whatever is allowed, or whatever is denied, we are in no way injured, nor can we in justice complain even in a natural way ; and still much less ought we to do so upon a moral account ; for, when considered as sinners against God, we deserve nothing but evil.

In this view therefore we ought to be thankful for every thing that befalls us ; at all times ac-

knowledging that God hath blessed us far beyond our merits, and punished us far less than our iniquities deserve.

Again: If we consider ourselves as servants, we may not then presume to chuse our own place, or determine our rank in his family, but must leave these things to our master's disposal.

Thus, even in a natural way, are we withheld from discontent, much more if we consider ourselves in a religious capacity, as Christians, where we are all upon a level, as "sons of the most High God," and in full assurance of eternal blessings hereafter, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

In this case to droop and be disconsolate, is surely very unbecoming; for, how can he be supposed to want any thing, whose portion is God, whose redeemer is Christ, and whose inheritance is glory?

Thus, in whatever light we view ourselves, we perceive forcible arguments for content.

But this is not all; the world and all things around us tend and concenter hereto.

Slight observations only upon the state of mankind, and the evils and calamities with which this world at all times abounds, will be sufficient hereto; for we cannot entertain a more foolish hope, than to expect to be distinguished by a constant

stant course of happiness, from that cloud of sufferers which here surrounds us.

We complain of our own lot, whilst there are thousands in the world whose state is so far worse than ours, that they would think themselves happy in exchange for our condition, which we think so insupportable.

When therefore we think that we have cause of discontent, we should look abroad a little, and see how it fares with the rest of mankind, and I may then venture to affirm, that it is not so bad as it might have been, and that there is nothing uncommon in it.

What were the sufferings of our blessed Lord, and how patiently did he endure them: "The foxes have holes (saith he), and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head:" yea, "he was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of sinful men;" and can we expect better accommodation and treatment than our Lord and Master? or shall we be discontented if we do not receive it?

It may perhaps grieve us to observe the common course of things, and see how some men prosper, whilst we ourselves have but little share in what are called the blessings of this life; but we should have recourse in this case to the determination of providence, and consider, that if such good things

are with-held, it is doubtless for our advantage, while possibly our tempers and nature may not be suited for elevation.

We should consider that there are many advantages which often arise out of those very inconveniences which we so heavily complain of, and there are many evils and bad consequences which frequently attend a more flourishing condition.

A person in a low-state hath perhaps but few friends, but those are usually sincere; then also he hath but few enemies, and they as usually inconsiderable; envy and calumny commonly spare him as not worth notice.

His labour, industry, and temperance, are the best means of preserving the health of his body, and the serenity of his mind.

Thus might we survey and examine many of the hardships of which men complain, and point out something profitable, which often accompanies them, and lessens their weight. But,

Wealth, power, and prosperity, (though harmless in themselves) are yet, to many persons, very pernicious; they come like proud and magnificent guests, and bring with them a long train of troublesome attendants, of follies, and cares, and disorders.

Besides, we should remember that a man's life, or the happiness of human life, "consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth."

Variety

No Variety of worldly goods will not produce content; a small uneasiness, an appetite, or passion ungratified, will take away the relish of what is agreeable.

No condition can make us happy, unless the foundation of it be laid in the due regulation of our own tempers; and with this we shall be happy and pleased in and with every thing.

There is no state of life (even the most desirable) but is attended with many peculiar disadvantages of its own; this we should consider, and not look at their comforts and conveniences only, but at the balance also that is laid against it; neither at those few only that are above us, but at the innumerable multitude also who are beneath us in life, and are pressed with its severest misfortunes.

But further: Not only from the foregoing arguments may we learn contentment, but also from the nature and consequences of the duty itself.

Contentment is a sovereign remedy against all poverty and afflictions whatever, removing them, or, at least, allaying all their attendant evils; for adversity can do us no harm, but as it discomposes and disturbs the mind. If therefore that is contented, satisfied, and settled upon God, it matters little for our external state.

The satisfaction springing from rational considerations, and a virtuous disposition of the heart, is far more precious and noble, more solid and

durable, than what any possession or fruition of worldly goods whatever can afford. Nothing, therefore, would fortify us more against any manner of accidents than the possessing our souls with this maxim, that "we can never be hurt but by "ourselves." If our reason be what it ought, and our actions according to it, we are invulnerable.

Thus, as contentment in its very nature assuages the sensible smart of affliction, and lessens its violence by calm submission, so it is also the most probable and ready means of bettering it, and of removing the pressures under which we groan, by disposing us to embrace and employ every just advantage conducible thereto; by which we may not only overcome the present difficulty, but rise even to a more elevated state.

Various other arguments and motives might be offered to instruct and perfect us in the great duty before us, viz. an unwearied endeavour to live well, and to maintain a conscience void of offence: a diligent application of our minds to an honest employment will serve much to improve in us this holy disposition; for,

Idleness, as it necessarily produces want, so it naturally breeds discontent; as it is the root of all evil, so is it also the parent of envy and ill-nature, as suffering our minds, when we having nothing to do, to wander on things they should not; whereas industry is innocent, is pleasing and profitable.

A right

A right estimate, and real value of all things below,* and a benevolent charity and feeling attention to the welfare, and the many wants and necessities of our fellow creatures, will also powerfully conduce hereto; but, above all, humility, the parent of all satisfaction.

If content is any where to be found, we might expect it most generally amongst the rich and noble, and great of this world, who do so abound in the good things of this life; but notwithstanding the prospect is so favourable and promising, yet common fact and experience, I believe, will convince us of the contrary. For,

The happiest of mankind are often subject to this great infirmity, viz. that, overlooking the solid blessings which they already have, they set their hearts upon some untried pleasure or advantage, which if they could but obtain, they should then be certainly and completely blessed, contented, and happy; they would then resign all complaint, believe without reluctance, and obey without murmur; and yet, no sooner are they arrived to the summit of their hopes, but "distant views arise," and they find themselves as far removed from their imaginary point of happiness as ever.

The
" Examine as much as you please the goods of the world, and you will always find them much more desirable than they really are, till you have enjoyed them.

" Examine likewise all the evils, and you will still find them to be feared beyond what they ought to be, 'till you have made the experiment."

The insatiableness of their desire, and the thirst of adding to the number of their riches is boundless, and generally increaseth with the increase thereof ; it is therefore “ the poor in spirit,” the meek, and the humble, who are the general possessors of this virtue.

Add to the foregoing considerations, the serious remembrance of the short and transitory nature of all earthly blessings, yea, and of all sublunary things, good as well as evil ; of the appointed debt we must one day pay, when all our good must be resigned, and all our evil cease from before us ; and of that eternal and unalterable state, which we must infallibly share ; these (thro’ the assistance of the divine grace) will render us easy and satisfied with whatever lot God shall, in his wisdom, here appoint us ; will cause us to fix our full trust in him, and continually to look forward to that better kingdom, where mere content shall never be known, for perfect happiness shall supply its place.

“ Forget not then, O man ! that thy station on “ earth is appointed by the wisdom of the Eternal, “ who knoweth thy heart, who seeth the vanity of “ all thy wishes, and who often in mercy denieth “ thy requests ; yet for all reasonable desires, for “ all honest endeavours, his benevolence hath “ established, in the nature of things, a probabi- “ lity of success.

“ The uneasiness thou feelest, the misfortunes “ thou bewailest, behold the root from whence “ they

“ they spring, even thine own folly, thine own
“ pride, thine own distempered fancy.

“ Murmur not therefore at the dispensations of
“ God, but correct thine own heart; neither say
“ within thyself, if I had wealth, or power, or
“ leisure, I would be happy; for know, they all
“ of them bring to their several possessors their
“ peculiar inconveniences.

“ The poor man feeth not the vexations and
“ anxieties of the rich, he feeleth not the difficult-
“ ties and perplexities of power, neither knoweth
“ he the wearisomeness of leisure, and therefore it
“ is that he repineth at his own lot.

“ Envy not, therefore the appearance of hap-
“ piness in any man, for thou knowest not his se-
“ cret grieves.

“ To be satisfied with a little is the greatest
“ wisdom; and he that increaseth his riches in-
“ creaseth his cares; but a contented mind is a
“ hidden treasure, and trouble findeth it not; yea,

“ Contentment makes us more happy in de-
“ siring nothing, than the greatest monarchs upon
“ earth in possessing all; it is the true Philosopher’s
“ stone, that turns all it touches into gold; the
“ poor are rich with, and the rich poor without it;
“ in it we have all the treasure that the world
“ contains.”

S E R M O N L I X.

The Sin of evil surmising, rash censuring, &c.

I. Cor. xiii. 4, 5. "Charity thinketh no Evil."

THE many excellent things spoken of Charity, and that it is the bond of perfection, and the source of so many benefits and blessings to mankind, is a sufficient recommendation of it to the sons of men.

I have already considered it in one quality, as removing every envious and disquieting disposition from before us.

We have here another branch of its benign influence, as excluding all rash and severe censures and ill-judging of our brethren. "Charity thinketh no evil."

By "thinking evil" we must necessarily understand the passing false judgment upon others, the censuring and condemning them without cause,

cause, and conceiving an ill opinion of them without proper and sufficient ground.

I shall here speak to this vice in general, as to its nature and sinfulness, and the proper means whereby to avoid it. And,

First, We think evil of others, when we censure and condemn them without proper and sufficient ground, judging them perhaps as reprobates, though we know nothing ill for certain by them; and here,

We may be guilty of this several ways, as for instance,

First, When we judge hardly and uncharitably of our neighbour only from uncertain report, which is most generally false, it rarely fails but that, if we take the pains to sift to the bottom of such things, and follow it to its first head, we shall find them, if not wholly false, yet greatly aggravated beyond their due measure.

Whoever therefore judges certainly from uncertain appearances, is and must be guilty of a breach of charity before us, because we cannot be sure that our judgment is right, it being much more probable to be wrong. This is plainly intimated to us in that advice given by our Saviour to the Jews: "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." is not this a just judgment? and this first **Secondly,**

Secondly, We are guilty of rash judgment, and are uncharitable in our censures of our neighbour, when we evil interpret, and put the worst construction upon his words and actions, and condemn him for that for which perhaps both God and his own conscience will for ever acquit him. This is a direct breach of the charity before us, which the Apostle expressly says “thinketh no evil.”

He who is candid and charitable, puts the best sense and interpretation upon every doubtful action of his neighbour, that it is in any way capable of.

Thirdly, Another instance of rash and uncharitable judgment is, when we infer of our neighbour from one, or some few single actions of his life, and not from the general tenor of his whole conduct. As for instance,

When from an act we infer an habit, or, from some few things which must be condemned in the man, we condemn the man himself, and judge him a reprobate and cast away. Now

This sort of judgment is rash and uncharitable, because it is built upon too slender grounds; for the best of men may and do fall sometimes, and there is no man altogether without fault.

To conclude, therefore, a general practice from a single defect, is wherein we may very easily

easily be mistaken. Besides, if the sin itself be such as must needs be condemned, yet the man may have since sincerely repented of it, and then in judging him, we condemn whom God hath already acquitted. In short,

Whether our judgment in this case be true or false, it is nevertheless rash and unwarrantable, and we judge of matters which in no way appertain unto us, and which God hath peculiarly reserved to himself. “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand.” Again,

Another instance of rash judgment is when we pretend to judge of the inward thoughts and intentions of men, further than they are declared by words, or actions of a certain signification.

For, it is the incommunicable property of God only to search the heart, and try the reins, and to know what is in man. When therefore we judge in these things, if our judgment is not always false, yet it is always rash and ill-grounded; because the very same actions may be done by several men, with very different designs; and unless we could judge certainly of these, we are by no means competent judges of the action. None is fit for this but God only,

who is intimate even with our most private thoughts.

This was what made the Apostle rise superior to the rash judgments of all his opponents. "With me (says he) it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self, for I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord; therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of the same."

Again, we are guilty also of the breach here before us, when we judge of the qualifications of men; i. e. of the good and evil that is in them, and what their state and condition towards God is, by the good and evil things which befall them in this world. This is indeed a common error, and none in the world more likely to be false, the dispensations of providence to men being so very uncertain, that (according to the wise man), "there is no judging by all that goeth before us." Our Saviour hath particularly refuted this error, in two very remarkable instances, recorded in the 13th chapter of St. Luke, and by way of inference

ference tells us, that "except we repent, we shall all likewise perish."

Having thus spoken to the import, I shall now,

Secondly, proceed to the sinfulness and folly thereof.

It must be considered that the practice of judging and censuring those who are not put into subjection under us, is an usurpation on God's right; for to him judgment and vengeance do most properly belong.

Whoever therefore judgeth another without authority, taketh too much upon him, and is guilty of the highest arrogance and presumption against the Sovereign Majesty of Heaven and Earth; an indignity which God cannot but most highly resent, and punish most severely, having solemnly declared that "he will not give his glory to another."

Secondly, As this practice is an act of high injustice towards God, so is it also towards men, as being most contrary to that golden rule of "doing as we would be done unto." As bad as we are, we all wish to be well thought of, and that no man should censure our actions. "What therefore we would not that men should do unto us, the same we should in no way do unto them."

Again: The practice hereof is as uncharitable as it is unjust, and it argues a most culpable defect of love towards our brethren; for whom we love we are always inclined to favour; we put the best interpretation we can upon every thing they say or do. "Charity thinketh no evil." Moreover, whom we love we always endeavour to represent as fair and lovely as we can to others. "It beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," for the good of our neighbour; it covereth and concealeth every lurking fault, and is industrious to hide from others whatever is defective in the person beloved.

These are some of the most natural fruits or effects of charity; and thus we always express our love towards ourselves; we interpret all our actions in the best sense, we make the fairest apologies which we can for them, and if they are manifestly culpable, we however strive what we can to lessen or excuse them, and, by all ways in our power, endeavour to render ourselves as lovely and as well esteemed as we possibly can. So that when, on the contrary, we expound our neighbour's actions in the worst sense, and instead of excusing his faults load him with the greatest aggravations, and publish and declare to others that harsh judgment

ment which we have formed of him in our own minds, endeavouring thereby to render him as odious and despicable to others, as we have represented him to ourselves; this is a most manifest breach of that law of charity, that second great commandment in the law, which comprehends under it all the duties which we owe to our neighbour,—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Thus far the sinfulness appears of this too common practice of censuring one another.

The folly of it is no less evident, if there was nothing more in it than only this, viz. that while we busy ourselves in prying into the behaviour of others, and passing our judgement upon them, we neglect our own business, as we must needs do; this alone would be folly enough. “He that is truly wise is wise for himself,” as Solomon observes: True wisdom shews itself in being most concerned about things which are most necessary to us; and it is no charity to do even kindness to strangers, when it is to the great hurt of ourselves, and those whom we are in justice, as well as charity, obliged to provide for. But,

The practice of censuring others is a much greater instance of folly than that; for, in spending time to sift out our neighbour’s faults,

we do not design, neither do we really do them any good, but wrong.

Not only therefore folly, but sin also, on this further account, is added hereto, when we spend our time which was given us for other purposes, not only to our own hurt, but the hurt of our neighbour also.

But again: The folly of this practice will yet further appear from the consideration of the mischiefs which will from thence arise to ourselves; for it is a great instance of folly to labour in vain, and to take a great deal of pains to no good purpose, but a greater to spend our time and pains only in working mischief to ourselves, in causing ourselves to be hated and evil spoken of by all who know us; and there is nothing which does more certainly produce these evil effects, than the practice of harshly censuring our neighbours; nothing more excites their hatred against us than this; because they look upon it (and that indeed not without reason) as a certain argument of our hatred and ill will towards them. They are therefore naturally induced, yea even, as it were, authorised to requite us in the same kind, it seeming but justice that he who intends, or practices mischief to others, should himself suffer the same, which in a thousand instances we may come to experience.

“Thou

“ Thou thoughtest wickedly (saith the Psalmist) that I was even such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things that thou hast done.” Again,

Not only by our neighbour, but by God also shall we be judged on this account; because, by this practice, which is highly injurious to our neighbour, and of no benefit or advantage to ourselves, we justly provoke God to judge us with the same judgment; yea, in condemning others, we condemn ourselves, who are equally guilty of many sins.

“ Judge not then, that ye be not judged; condemn not, that ye be not condemned; for with what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you again, and ye shall by no means escape the just judgment of God.”

What remains is to propose some remedies for the prevention and cure of this evil disposition. And,

First, The most sure and effectual means hereto is to be in charity with all men, and to “ love our neighbour as ourselves,” which if we do, there will be no difficulty at all in forbearing all harsh censures against him; for, of itself, it naturally disposeth us hereto. “ Charity thinketh no evil;” yea, as “ hatred stirreth up strife, so (according to the wise man) love covereth all sins.”

Another

Another most excellent means hereto is frequently to call to mind the mistakes we have already committed in our judgments of others; for when we consider that we have often already been deceived, and have many times, through rashness and precipitancy, condemned those whom afterwards we have seen cause to acquit, this will make us more cautious for the future, and persuade us to take more time to consider things, and never again to settle our judgment, till we are sure that we understand the case fully.

Lastly, Let us frequently and seriously reflect on our own faults and miscarriages, and that will effectually cure us of all proneness to censure hardly of others.

How great a preservative this would be to keep us herefrom, we may easily learn from the consequence of that decision given by our Saviour in the case of the adulterous woman, where the accusers being convicted by their own consciences, went out “one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last, ’till Jesus and the woman were left alone.”

And this would be a general consequence of men’s reflecting as they ought upon themselves, and examining their own behaviour; for being by a just sight and sense of our own manifold sins made humble and lowly in our own con-

ceits,

ceits, we shall see that it does by no means become us, who are sinners, to take upon us to censure others, who perhaps are less vile, especially as we must ere long appear before the judgment seat of God, to give an account of our own actions, and where we have but too much reason to expect to be dealt with ourselves, according to the manner of our behaviour to others, and to have “judgment passed upon us without mercy, who, ourselves, have shewed no mercy.”

“ Judge not, therefore, that ye be not judged; condemn not, that ye be not condemned; for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and with the same measure that we mete withal,” we are assured it “will be measured to us again.”

“ Be willing therefore to commend, and be slow to censure, so shall praise be upon thy virtues, and the eye of enmity shall be blind to thy imperfections.

“ Attribute not the good actions of another to bad causes; thou canst not know his heart, but the world will know by this that thine is full of envy.

“ Suspect not evil in any one until thou seest it, neither mistrust without reason; it is uncharitable.

“ Condemn

“ Condemn not the judgment of another,
“ because it differeth from thine own; may
“ not even both be in an error ?

“ Thou feelest in thine own breast no love
“ of goodness, and therefore believest thy
“ neighbour to be like unto thyself.

“ Thou endeavourest to deprecate those that
“ excel thee, and puttest an evil interpretation
“ on all their doings.

“ Thou liest on the watch to meditate mis-
“ chief; but the detestation of man pursueth
“ thee, and thou art cursed in the thoughts of
“ thine own heart.”

S E R M O N . L X .

On the due Regulation of our Thoughts.

Prov. xxiv. 9. “*The Thought of Foolishness is Sin.*”

HAVING spoken of the evil of censoriousness, and the unfair interpretations of the words and actions of others, I shall (as that vice arises from the evil of our minds) endeavour here the regulation of our thoughts, not in respect indeed singularly to the vice already mentioned, but at large, as comprehending and guarding against all evil thoughts whatever.

“*The thought of foolishness is sin.*”

There are few persons so wicked, but they endeavour at least to put on an air of virtue and innocence, and to keep their sins as private as they can.

But though by this means they may for a time impose upon others, or perhaps upon themselves, yet while the bent of their hearts is turned towards sin, and they are under the

power

power of any vicious reigning inclination, though out of any prudential motives they are restrained from the outward act of sin, the guilt of it notwithstanding shall be charged upon their consciences; for, in the judgment of God, and indeed in the very reason of the thing, when we consider man as a moral and free agent, "the thought of foolishness is sin."

In discoursing further on those words, I shall, First, Enquire what is their particular import and meaning.

Secondly, I shall lay down some proper rules and directions for the better regulation of our thoughts.

First, I am to enquire what is meant by "the thought of foolishness."

Folly and sin are terms promiscuously used in Scripture to signify one and the same thing, so that the thought of foolishness may in general import any such thought as hath sin, or some sinful action for its object, which the will not only consents to entertain, but which the mind delights to dwell and dilate itself upon.

The ambitious man, for instance, pleases himself with thinking, when he hath brought his designs to bear, how he will be courted, caressed, and admired by all that know him; how he will then be in a condition to insult and revenge himself upon all those who stood in his way,

way, and with what a becoming air of disdain he will look back upon those whom he hath left so far behind him.

The man of pleasure entertains himself in as agreeable a manner, with conceiving how he would revel in all the delights of the sons of men, and what fine opportunities he would have of proving mirth, of knowing madness and folly, of “walking in the ways of his “heart, and in the sight of his eyes,” were he master of a fortune answerable to his desires.

The man of violence and injustice says in his heart, “had I power equal to my will, how might I exalt myself against my neighbour, and with what ease might I hunt him down, and devour him ! How might I “oppress the “poor righteous man without a cause,” and without being obliged to give any other reason for oppressing him than that “my strength is “the law of justice, for that which is feeble is “found to be nothing worth.” Again,

The man of the earth, whose prevailing temper is covetousness, finds as agreeable entertainment in such thoughts and amusements as these.

“ Could I propose such acquirement, or lay by according to my desires, how cautious would I be that no importunity of friends, no cries of the orphan, the widow, or fatherless, that

no occasion whatever, whether of other people, or my own, should induce me to break in upon it? What satisfaction will it give me to take a turn now and then to visit the ark, wherein I have deposited the God of this world? what pleasure to "behold it with my eyes!"

Such possibly, among others as ridiculous, may be the thoughts of a covetous wretch, who has no heart, no design to do good, or to rejoice in the portion which God has given him in this life, but seems only to contrive how those he designs to do good to at last, may rejoice at his death.

Now these several kinds of thoughts which I have mentioned, though men only feed their imagination with them, and take a sensible pleasure in projecting what they might do under such and such circumstances of life, without coming to any fixed or settled resolution of doing it, there is no doubt but such thoughts are really sinful, and offensive to God, and that upon the following accounts:

First, As such thoughts are sinful in their cause and original; they proceed out of a heart already corrupted, and in a state of disorder; "a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit;" so these evil thoughts, which our minds are most apt to run upon, proceed from some vicious passion, or perhaps "presumptuous sin, which hath

“ hath got the dominion over us ;” according to which Solomon hath wisely observed, “ that as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he ;” i. e. according to the general current, or prevailing course of a man’s thoughts, he may be able to form a judgment of his spiritual state, and what order he is in with respect to religion.

Secondly, To give way to such vain and foolish thoughts, is an argument of a mind very much estranged from God. Did we love the Supreme Being as we are commanded, “ with all our hearts and with all our minds,” we should chiefly employ our thoughts in such meditations as would bring us nearer to him, and not in such as still separate us further from him ; we should endeavour after such an holy frame and temper of mind, as is most agreeable to the purity and perfection of his nature, and not give entertainment to such thoughts as defile the mind, and render it carnal ; a temper which the Apostle expressly tells us “ is enmity “ to God.”

Thirdly, Such impure and loose thoughts, when they give us any sensible pleasure, are directly contrary to the fruits of the Holy Spirit, to which they are opposed by the Apostle. “ The flesh (says he) lusteth against the spirit, “ and the spirit against the flesh, and these are “ contrary the one to the other.”

A a 2

And,

And, indeed, it is impossible to conceive how those, whose minds are enlightened by the spirit of God, and who have tasted of his heavenly gift, should deliberately admit any unholy or impure thoughts, much less entertain them with pleasure and complacency; for, “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.”

Fourthly, Such foolish and vain imaginations are directly contrary to all those divine precepts in Holy Scripture, which require us to be heavenly and spiritually minded, to “be renewed in the spirit of our minds, to purify our hearts from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,” and, in a word, to “watch and pray that we enter not into temptation;” whereas to take pleasure in such thoughts, supposing them otherwise innocent, is to put ourselves directly in the way of temptation, and that indeed most imminently, because we are never sooner overcome, than when we fight against pleasure.

I have been the more particular in proving it unlawful for us to entertain our thoughts upon any sin with complacency, because a great many persons (otherwise well and piously disposed) are apt to think, so that they do but abstain from the gross and external acts of sin, all is well, and there is no great harm in thinking

ing on it, though with some degree of pleasure and delight.

As this therefore is highly sinful in itself, so it must be further granted,

Secondly, That a thought formed, and a deliberate intention is that which renders the sinner criminal in the highest degree, and which will be charged upon him, as if the sin had been actually committed. God, to whom all "hearts are open, and all desires known," needs no external evidence to discover our secret designs; so that a sinner, who is only restrained from the outward act of sin, for want of opportunity, or for fear of disgrace, or any other temporal motive, which doth not affect his conscience, will be reputed, before the tribunal of Heaven, as guilty of the fact.

Our Lord and Saviour hath particularly determined this point.

However, it is certainly an happiness, whatever our criminal desires or intentions are, to be restrained from acting them; and we ought to bless God for any preventing providence, which hath put us under so happy a restraint, not only as we may perhaps hereby avoid giving scandal, or doing injury to others, but also, because the act of sin is commonly attended and inflamed with stronger impressions of it, and with more dangerous consequences with respect to our spiritual state.

A a 3

But

But still, if all these aggravating circumstances could be supposed to be really in the intention of a sinner, he is then certainly as culpable and guilty in his own conscience, and before God, as if he had proceeded to action ; for, “out of the heart are the issues of life ;” and, “as a man thinketh, so really is he.”

Having thus considered at large what we are to understand by “a thought of foolishness,” I proceed,

Secondly, To lay down some proper rules and directions for the better regulation of our thoughts ; and,

First, The principal rule I would prescribe to this end is, that we should take care to be always one way or other usefully, or at least innocently employed, for the soul of man is an active being, and must always be thinking of something or other ; so that if the mind be not busied in attending upon the more proper and noble exercises of reason, or however upon the innocent and ordinary affairs of human life, it will naturally turn itself to vain and sinful amusements. Idleness lays us very open to the incursion of evil thoughts, and the tempter is never so very busy with us, as when we have nothing to do.

“While men slept, the enemy sowed his “tares.” Idleness enervates the powers of the mind, takes us off our guard, and exposes us more

more defenceless to every temptation. "I went
" (says Solomon) by the field of the slothful,
" and by the vineyard of the man void of un-
" derstanding; and lo, it was all grown over
" with thorns, and nettles had covered the
" face thereof."

The words may be explained in a literal sense; but, as it is usual for the inspired penmen to shadow heavenly and spiritual things by sensible representations, so there is no question but that Solomon had a further and more noble design in these words, viz. to shew us that there is nothing more apt to choke and destroy the good seed of religion, or contribute to the growth of all manner of sin and impiety, than an habit of idleness.

As we would therefore not be guilty of sinful thoughts, let us take care to be employed as constantly as may be to one good purpose or other; or, if we allow ourselves in any innocent respites and diversions from our more serious employments, let them be such as do in no way tend to dissipate or weaken the force of the mind, but only to refresh it, and thereby make us more lively and cheerful in our after applications to the several duties of our calling, especially to the spiritual acts and exercises of religion.

Secondly, Let us carefully examine what those things are which have been most apt to excite

excite evil thoughts in us heretofore, and let us carefully avoid all occasions of them for the future. But further,

In order to the better government of our thoughts, we should live under a constant sense of God's presence and inspection over us.

How should we be ashamed and confounded, were other men (though of like passions with ourselves) conscious to our thoughts? and if, indeed, notwithstanding all the arts of hypocrisy and dissimulation, men cannot, on many occasions, forbear to render themselves offensive, how intolerable should we then appear to one another, were all our vain and aspiring; all our envious and revengeful, our covetous and carnal thoughts, laid open without disguise? But,

Why are we so careful to hide these things before men? "He that made the eye, shall he not see? and if he do, shall he not punish?" "Hell and destruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the children of men?"

Let us then, by setting God always before us, be more effectually persuaded to a due carefulness herein, and always so employ our minds in such an useful and pious manner, as may tend most to the perfection of our nature, and the improvement of our Christian graces.

Lastly,

Lastly, To the foregoing rules and directions for the better government of our thoughts, we must add sincere and fervent prayer to God for the illuminating and sanctifying graces of his holy spirit.

Of ourselves we shall still, whatever we may design, be unable “to think any thing as of “ourselves,” i. e. any thing in that pious manner, and with that purity of intention which we ought.

Let us therefore particularly pray that God, in order to preserve us from all evil thoughts, and to inspire us with such only as are perfective of our nature and pleasing to him, would by his holy spirit illuminate our understandings, and purify our hearts; that he would give us the grace both of light and sense; of light, to direct our minds in all holy and devout meditations, and of sense, to render such meditations the more grateful and pleasing to him.

I shall conclude all with the words of the Apostle.

“ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are “ true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are “ pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be “ any virtue, if there be any praise, think on “ these things.”

SERMON

S E R M O N L X I .

Injustice—the Evil and Unreasonable- ness of it.

LUKE xviii. 11. “*Unjust, Extortioners.*”

IT is not my design here to speak of injustice in that high degree of it as exercised in the open violation of the laws of mankind, in depriving them of the property of their goods by theft and robbery: this will fully justify a place by itself.

My design here is to speak of those lesser acts of injustice;

“ Of accepting the persons of men, in the “ administrations of justice.”

“ The not being faithful to our trusts, nor “ true to our promises.”

“ The with-holding just dues.”

“ The not doing the labour of our hire, “ over-reaching in trade, and taking advan-
“ tage of the necessities of the needy.”

In

In all which men are but too prone, and generally glory in the greatness of their iniquity.

All these appeared so odious in the eyes of a Phárisée, that he made it matter of thanksgiving to God, that he was not guilty of them. “I thank God that I am not as other men are, “unjust extortioners.” But,

Without attempting here a vindication of the whole character before us, as it was purposely introduced to shew a grossness of defect in another point; it is hoped that people professing themselves Christians will need not many arguments to deter them from it.

It is very seldom but that, in the worst of characters, some good qualities are to be found intermixed. It is our duty therefore in all these cases to select the one from the other, and as we avoid the evil of their doings, so “whatsoever things are honest, just, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue or praise in them, these we are to think of,” imitate, and follow.

First then, the character of injustice, as already mentioned, is the “accepting the persons of men in the administrations of justice;” i. e. the perverting what is right through favour or affection, or extending the due prerogative for transgression through ill-will or dislike; in both which cases, the man who is guilty

guilty of it is unjust. " That which is altogether right shalt thou do, saith the Lord, " and in no way shalt thou pervert justice or judgment before me, I am the Lord."

To be placed as the executioners of justice is a great trust, in the discharge of which, if men be biased by favour or interest, or drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the public good, it is a far greater crime, and of worse consequence, than any private act of injustice whatever.

Whether judgment be passed through favour or fear, in excess of passion or severity; in both cases truth is injured, authority abused, equity perverted, and the public security endangered, by weakening those motives which do, and which should influence private conduct.

The integrity of the discharge of all other relative and social duties of life will much depend on the example of that integrity with which judicial proceedings are determined; and, if either real offences are designedly overlooked, or groundless accusations unfairly countenanced, either way the mischief will extend far beyond the single instance, and will embolden the progress of wickedness, and discourage a faithful adherence to unbefriended honesty.

It

It was a command under the law, and its moral obligation will be ever in force, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.” “He then that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God;” for, “he that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.”

But further: Another instance of injustice mentioned is, “the not being faithful to our trusts, nor true to our promises.” And,

First, Of breach of trust. He that deceives a man in any trust that is committed to him, is guilty of a great injustice, and that the most treacherous, and differs in degree according to the circumstances committed to him.

If the fortunes of children, and gifts bequeathed to relieve the necessities of the needy, be the matter in hand, and these are withheld, or prodigally embezzled, whosoever doth this, is, in the highest degree, guilty of the vice before us.

This is both impiety and sacrilege, and must therefore give the offender a title to all those curses that attend these several vices; and even as to lesser matters, it will by no means avail

us, if we are unfaithful in them, to say “is it not a little?”

That wise observation of our Saviour is here truly applicable: “He that is unjust in the “least, is unjust also in much.”

The reason perhaps why he is unjust only in a little is, because it is not in his power to be more so; if it was, his evil inclination would carry him to greater lengths: one act of injustice naturally leads to another; the reason for the second is as good as the first, and the temptation is stronger the more we comply with it. The depravity of a wicked man sticks at nothing; there is no justifying therefore the least iniquity.

When men are once addicted hereto, how vilely prostitute are they? they are neither fit for counsel nor friendship, for service nor command, for office nor honour, but, “like salt “that hath lost its savour, will be fit only for “the dunghill, to be cast out, and trodden un-“der foot of men, and perish for ever.” But, Secondly, “Non-observers of our promises.” That which a man hath brought upon him by voluntary promise, he cannot without great injustice with-hold; for, by this a man is held as firmly as by any other contract whatever; and, surely, whoever fails herein, cannot be an imitator of God, who “hath always been mind-“ful

“ ful of his covenant and promise, that he
“ made to a thousand generations.”

The Psalmist, when making mention of those “ who shall dwell in the tabernacle of the Lord, and rest upon his holy hill,” says, “ Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life, and doth the thing that is right, and speaketh the truth from his heart; he that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour, nor taken reward against the innocent; he that sweareth unto his neighbour and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.”

“ It is better then that thou shouldest not vow, than vow and not pay;” for, to say afterwards “ it was an error,” will not be accepted either before God or man.

But further, “ with-holding just dues.” A man thro’ losses or accidents may perhaps be so reduced as to be incapable of answering every just demand; in this case charity and compassion, if not forgiveness, have ample room for exercise.

But where men, through extravagance, involve themselves in difficulties, or even designedly take of their neighbours without hope or view of return, the highest name of injustice is here too soft to express their characters, and even the suffering them to “ die the common-

“ death of all men,” is too lenient for such vile impostors; for this is no less than direct robbery, or worse, for they hereby deceive (Judas like) through appearance of friendship, and leave the deceived no adequate means of redress.

Here also we may make mention of that injustice as exercised in the with-holding the just wages of the servant, and the hire of the labourer.

It is Solomon’s advice, “ defraud not the labourer of his hire; for it is his hope, and he setteth his heart upon it; yea, give it him ere the sun goeth down, that he may bless thee, otherwise, if he cry unto me in the bitterness of his soul, I the Lord will hear him.”

By hearing him we are to understand redressing him.

The complaints of those that are thus injured ascend up to God. “ Behold (saith St. James) the hire of the labourers, which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them that have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”

We have a strict command in this matter: “ Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, at his day shalt thou give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon

“ upon it, lest he cry against thee unto the
“ Lord, and it be sin unto thee.” If not there-
fore for his sake, yet for our own, let us give
as is due to him. Again,

As reason and the divine laws do thus pro-
tect the hireling and his wages, so no less do
they demand from him, in his station, equal
strictness and uprightness. That they perform
“ the labour of their hire honestly, not as eye
“ servants, pleasing men only, but with single-
“ ness of heart, fearing God, knowing also
“ that they have a master which is in Heaven.”

It is a great absurdity to expect that their
superiors should be exact in justice with them,
whilst they at the same time are idle, are remiss
and careless, extravagant and unfaithful in all
their undertakings, unless it be the severity of
justice in punishing them according to their
deserts.

But further: Another instance of injustice
(as too commonly practised) is, “over-reach-
“ ing in trade.” “It is nought, it is nought,
“ saith the buyer, but when he is gone he
“ boasteth.”

The hiding of imperfections, or with-hold-
ing just commendations, or over-rating either
“ a false weight and a false balance, these all
“ are an abomination to the Lord, for them
“ that deal truly are his delight, and he hates
“ the thing that is evil.” In a word,

In the various scenes of life there are so many arts and opportunities of deceit, that a man had need fence himself with a very firm resolution, nay, love of justice, or he will be in danger of falling into temptation.

The last instance of injustice mentioned was, "taking advantage of the necessities of "the needy," "unjust, extortioners."

I am at a loss here for words to describe the character before us; what deformity of aspect! what complication of wickedness! what want of tenderness, and bowels of compassion, must constitute him, who can take pleasure in distressing the distressed, and taking advantage of the needy, the weak, and ignorant!

No wants can raise the value of things, neither will the imperfections of one man justify craft and knavery in another.

The guilt hereof is great, and accordingly God hath threatened that he will as severely punish it: "He that hath oppressed the poor, "and hath spoiled by violence, shall surely die, "his blood shall be upon him." Again,

"For the oppression of the poor, and for the "sighing of the needy, now will I arise (saith "the Lord), and will set him at safety from "him that puffeth at him;" "nor thieves, nor "covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor "extortioners, shall enter into the kingdom of "Heaven."

The

The advice of Solomon therefore is excellent: “Rob not the poor, because he is poor, “neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for “the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the “souls of those that spoil them.”

Upon the whole, justice is concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual intercourse with one another; that we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity in opposition to falsehood and breach of trust; equity and a good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction.

These are the principal branches and instances of this great and comprehensive duty of justice, and the injustice of its contrary and opposite vices, is evident from that aversion we all have to be thus dealt with ourselves, and from those inward feelings which we experience when the like befalls us, and we are circumvented and oppressed by others. It is directly opposite to that golden rule of “doing “to others as we would they should do to us,” and is owing to a bitter root within us, a distrust of God, unfeelingness to our fellow creatures, and a discontent with our present condition.

Need I use arguments more, or are these insufficient? nay, whoever are perpetrators of these

these things, can in no way enter into the kingdom of Heaven, for “ therein nothing enters “ that defileth, that maketh a lie, or useth de-“ ceit.” To conclude :

“ The peace of society dependeth on justice, “ the happiness of individuals on the safe en-“ joyment of all their possessions.

“ Keep the desires of thy heart therefore “ within the bounds of moderation, and let the “ hand of justice lead them aright.

“ Cast not an evil eye on the goods of thy “ neighbour, let whatever is his property be “ sacred from thy touch.

“ Let no temptation allure thee, nor any “ provocation excite thee to lift up thy hand “ to the hazard of thy life.

“ Defame him not in his character, bear no “ false witness against him.

“ Corrupt not his servant to cheat or forsake “ him, and the wife of his bosom O tempt not “ to sin !

“ It will be a grief to his heart which thou “ canst not relieve, an injury to his life which “ no reparation can atone.

“ In thy dealings with men be impartial and “ just, and do unto them as thou wouldest they “ should do unto thee.

“ Be faithful to thy trust, and deceive not “ the man who relieth upon thee ; be assured

“ it

“ it is less evil in the sight of God to steal than
“ to betray.

“ Oppress not the poor, and defraud not of
“ his hire the labouring man.

“ When thou sellest for gain, hear the whis-
“ perings of conscience, and be satisfied with
“ moderation, nor from the ignorance of the
“ buyer make any advantage.

“ Take no advantage of the ignorance, ne-
“ cessity, or prodigality of any man, for that
“ gain can never be blessed ; yea, a little wrong
“ done to another is a great injury done to
“ ourselves. The severest punishment of an
“ injury is the conscience of having done it ;
“ and no man suffers more than he that is
“ turned over to the pain of repentance.

“ Pay the debts what thou owest, for he
“ who gave thee credit relied upon thy ho-
“ nour ; and to with-hold from him his due,
“ is both mean and unjust.

“ Finally, O Son of Society ! examine thy
“ heart, call remembrance to thy aid, and if
“ in any of these things thou findest thou hast
“ transgressed, take sorrow and shame to thy-
“ self, and make speedy reparation to the ut-
“ most of thy power.”

SERMON LXII.

The Rule of Equity, in Opposition to Injustice.

MATT. vii. 12. "*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*"

AMONG the great virtues on which the Ancients and Moderns have written, none has been preferred to Justice, or more accurately discussed.

It is confessedly the most extensive, and therefore more immediately embraces and comprehends the other virtues. Indeed it is difficult to form a distinct idea of any one virtue exclusive of others, but impossible to conceive justice abstracted from all, or any of the rest. It is a virtue, comprehending in itself a system of duty, eminently distinguished by the name of the social virtue.

The

The rule before us is of a very large extent, and of singular use in the whole conduct of life; it comprehends under it all the several branches both of justice and charity; and (if rightly understood) will direct us how we ought to behave one towards another in all possible circumstances of life.

This I shall endeavour to shew distinctly as I proceed in the discourse; at present, and before I advance to those several particulars which the subject before us will suggest, I shall only observe, that this rule was given us by a person of infinite wisdom and of absolute authority. It is not merely the direction of a philosopher, who might deceive others, or be deceived himself, but issued from him in whom were lodged infinite treasures of wisdom; who comprehends in one view all the several relations in which we can stand to one another; who must discern what is in all cases most proper to be done, and therefore who was the fittest, yea, the only fit person to prescribe an universal rule of life.

To this infinity of wisdom let us add the perfection of his authority also. He was the Messiah, the anointed of God, and upon that account invested with an absolute right to give us laws; nay, (which is yet more to our purpose) he is God-self, one with his father, and must

must therefore have this authority belonging to him inseparably.

Let us then consider the rule before us with that attention which is due to infinite wisdom; and with that reverence which is owing to absolute authority. To proceed:

The general sense of the rule before us, as truly evident, is this, viz. that whatever good or advantage we should be apt to desire of others, that, in our turn, we should be free and ready to bestow at all times on them, and according to their need; for, the same desires which we feel in ourselves are common to our whole kind. But,

However easy this rule may seem to be, yet there are great and frequent mistakes in the application of it, and men but too commonly make it their authority not only to retaliate good, but evil also to their neighbour, promiscuously applying it to every act of man.

With respect therefore to our dealings with men, this rule is intended to direct us in the right discharge of such actions only towards them as are known to be lawful; it is by no means intended to be a rule of retribution, or of requital, but of kindness. It must therefore restrain us from doing those ill turns to our neighbour, which we ourselves should be apt to resent.

Though

Though we may be prejudiced against others, yet we cannot be so against ourselves. The general observance of this rule therefore would cause that we should not do an injury willingly to any man.

There is no one so absurd and unreasonable as not to see and acknowledge the absolute equity of this command in the theory, however he may swerve and decline from it in practice.

The actual equality of nature, and the possibility, if not probability, of equality of conditions in all men, one time or other, fully manifesteth the equity and reasonableness of the rule before us.

It is but fit and reasonable that we should carry an even hand between ourselves and others, because our neighbour is properly ourselves, we being all equal in nature.

For, whatever difference there may be in men's outward circumstances (which is merely accidental), yet when divested of these all men are alike; all men have the same creator, and are equally related to God; therefore to act by our neighbour as we would be dealt by ourselves, is an universal and an indispensable law of justice.

Besides, there is a possibility, if not probability, of the equality of all men's conditions

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and circumstances one time or other; the man of dignity and power may be humbled, and he of low degree exalted.

The affairs of mankind are fluctuating and variable, and we have no security of maintaining our present state; but, for any thing we know to the contrary, a few days may reduce us to the necessity of requesting those favours which it is now in our power to grant.

He therefore that walks disorderly is neither just for the present, nor provident for the future; but, without looking forward to possibilities, we may easily see the necessity hereof, by reflecting on our present circumstances.

All men are dependent one on another, nor can any man enjoy himself, or indeed so much as subsist, without receiving equal treatment from men, as well below as above him.

Now, if this be the case (and I may appeal to the conscience of every man for the truth of it), surely it must be impossible to make our neighbour's case our own, without acting in such a manner as we should wish he would to us; we must unavoidably feel his distresses or desires, and by relieving him, do the greatest favour to ourselves.

Indeed the reasonableness of this injunction is so very apparent, that it may be thought to need

need scarce any proof; it seems to shaine by its own native light.

Though a man had never heard of Christ, and were incapable of receiving this precept on the foot of divine revelation, yet, as soon as proposed to him, he could not but approve it as a just and equitable rule. A man must have lost all sense of humanity not to feel, in some sort, the wants of another; we have a direct consciousness of our own needs, and as there is implanted in us a tenderness for our kind, so we cannot but be sensible, if we duly reflect, of that uneasiness which affects our neighbour; and, if we desire relief in our own case, it cannot appear otherwise than fit and proper that we grant it in the case of another.

And here it is but turning our hearts inwardly upon ourselves, and supposing his case ours, and ours his, and we are immediately directed in every act of man; for we all love ourselves, and consequently must be moved with a very ardent affection towards every thing which appears to us to be good, and must abhor in like manner whatever shall appear to be evil. It is easy in every case to discover what we ourselves might desire, and consequently what the rule of our conduct in every case should be to every man: yea,

Did we strictly observe this one maxim before us, it would not only prevent all the frauds

and too sore oppressions which do abound in the world, and which are not more the infelicities than the shame and reproach of mankind, and which no laws nor punishment can restrain, but would induce us to all love, and to every good work; for,

This rule detects and convicts, condemns and shames men at a bar from which none can appeal or except against; here no witnesses are wanted, no inquest nor judge, but a man's own self, which is always present, and he that is faulty, his own conscience will condemn him; yea, no man who consults this oracle will find in his heart to oppress his neighbour by power or interest with unjust assaults, or base cunning deceit, or take advantage of his weakness, his simplicity, or need.

For this principle of inherent self-consciousness sticks close to our nature, and is ever before our eyes; and if it be but duly applied, will determine us to just and righteous, to fair and candid dealings; for, "measuring our-selves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves with ourselves," we take the surest way to be both just and wise. Indeed,

The use of this maxim is so general, and the occasion of having recourse to it so frequent, that experience only can shew its just importance.

But

But further: As this rule is of infinite service, so is it also of vast and comprehensive influence; it extends to all ranks and conditions of men, and to all kinds of action and intercourse between them; to matters of charity, generosity, and civility, as well as justice; to negative no less than to positive duties; the ruler and the ruled are alike subject to it; public communities can no more exempt themselves from its obligation than private persons.

“All persons must fall down before it, all nations must do it service.” It is alike easy and obvious to all understandings, to the meanest and most ignorant of men, as well as to those of the greatest parts, and most refined improvements. God is on this, as well as on other accounts, “no respecter of persons,” having made that which was most necessary most common, and consequently suited this principle, which all men have occasion to use, equally to the apprehension of all men.

They therefore who are incapable of long trains in deductions of reason, and of adapting the several rules of morality to the various circumstances of action, are yet able (equally with the acutest philosophers or casuists) to look into their own hearts, to see the bent of their inclinations, and the force of their own desires to-

wards themselves, and so to act accordingly to others.

Human laws are often so numerous as to escape our memories, and sometimes so darkly and inconsistently worded as to puzzle our understandings; and their original obscurity is not seldom improved by the nice distinctions and subtle reasonings of those who profess to clear them; so that under these several disadvantages they lose much of their force and influence, and, in some cases, raise more disputes than perhaps they determine.

But here is a law attended with none of these inconveniences; the grossest minds can scarce misapprehend it; the weakest memories are capable of retaining it; no perplexing comment can easily cloud it; the authority of no man's gloss upon earth can, if we are but sincere, sway us to make a wrong construction of it, for (to use the expression of the Evangelical Prophet) "it is an highway, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein;" yea, "he that runneth may read it," for "it is nigh unto us, in our mouth and in our heart, that we may do it:" upon all which accounts it is that it hath been so universally received, Jews, Gentiles, and Christians freely assenting hereto.

What

What now remains is to make a few inferences from what hath been said.

And here, though this maxim is not properly a rule of religion towards God, but the motive and measure of our duty towards our neighbour, yet it is of so great authority, that without a peculiar regard hereto in our intercourse with men, the most glorious pretences of piety towards God will but little avail.

Men, by a mighty zeal about opinions, without regard to equity, justice, or mercy, neither honour God, nor benefit the world, nor gain reputation to themselves.

To be devout in any form of worship, without honesty and ingenuity in our dealings, is, at best, but acting the part of an hypocrite, without any true notion or sense of religion. To profess and make a shew, though of the greatest zeal, without a proper regard to this rule, will but make us suspected of the greater deceit.

He who neglects the weightier matters of faith, justice, and mercy, can have no pretence to Christianity: God loves mercy more than "sacrifice," and is better pleased with our equitable dealing, than with the most rich or costly sacrifices.

But further: The general practice of the rule before us will of itself necessarily conduce to

to the benefit and happiness of mankind ; for, if this was duly observed, no injuries would be offered at all, no requests made but what were reasonable, and none denied but what were not fit to be granted ; and we should universally live loving and beloved of all men, as hereby wholly benefiting the whole race of mankind, as opportunity offers.

Upon the whole, it would be no unprofitable reflection nor mean motive to induce us hereto, to observe from hence the great benignity and goodness of God, who hath made even our own will and our self love a complete law of action and measure of duty to us. “ All things what-
“ soever ye would (i. e. whatever ye are wil-
“ ling) that men should do unto you, do you
“ even so to them.”

Surely with exceeding propriety did our Saviour say “ my yoke is easy.”

To conclude : This precept, tho’ “ worthy
“ of all acceptation, though worthy of all men
“ to be received,” on account of its superlative
excellence, yet our Saviour, more strongly to
enforce it, adds a very powerful and cogent
reason : for to do this (says he) is all that the
law and the prophets require, “ this is the law
“ and the prophets ;” i. e. the whole moral
law, however dispersed or variously inculcated
in the whole law, and in all the prophets, is
reducible

reducible hereto; yea, there is no instance of social duty whatever but what may be deduced from this rule, of "doing to others even as we would that they should do unto us."

May we then (constantly bearing in mind the excellency of this golden rule, or law of universal equity) deal out good offices plentifully to our brethren, "even as we would that they should unto us;" for, by so doing, "an entrance will be ministered unto us abundantly," not only into the good things of this life, but also "into the everlasting kingdom of God."

SERMON LXIII.

Against Uncharitableness, Unmercifulness, &c.

II. TIM. iii. 3. “*Without natural Affection.*”

WE have here (by the Apostle) laid before us a long catalogue of offences, not of the least, but rather of the greatest malignity, and most deformed aspect, which shall come upon men in the last days, among which “want of natural affection” obtains a place, being the last of that which commonly remains in men, being not so much a virtue as a natural principle. When a man puts off this, we may give him up for lost to all manner of goodness.

To be “without natural affection,” then, is to be devoid of every grace, and will justly bring us into condemnation.

This I shall endeavour to make appear under the following particulars:

First,

Fifth, That unmercifulness and uncharitableness to the poor is a great sin.

Secondly, That such a sin, though alone, and without any other guilt, is sufficient to our ruin for ever.

As to the first, it is no single sin, but contains in it inhumanity and impiety: and first,

Inhumanity: It is an argument of a cruel and savage disposition, not to pity those that are in need and necessity; and he doth not pity the misery of others really, that doth not relieve them when he hath both the ability and opportunity by him.

To see men, like ourselves, “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” labour under want and necessity, and yet not be moved to commiserate them, is, as much as in us lies, to put off our own nature, and be hard-hearted thereto, and so (in some sense) do what the Apostle says, “no man ever yet did, hate his own flesh.”

And this the Scripture speaks of as the greatest inhumanity, and calls it murder: “whoso hateth his brother is a murderer;” and not to relieve him when in want and necessity is to hate him.

“Whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth love in him?”

But

But further, it is not only cruelty to our brother, but to ourselves also ; for, seest thou a poor man in want and necessity, in need and misery, there is nothing that hath befallen him but what is common to man, and is what may be our own lot and portion one day or other. In being therefore cruel to him in his need, we hereby “ teach men an evil lesson against “ ourselves,” when we shall at any time sue for favour from them.

This is the first aggravation of this sin, the inhumanity and folly of it.

Secondly, Besides this, it is a great impiety towards God.

Unmercifulness to the poor hath this four-fold impiety in it ; it is a contempt of God ; it is an usurpation upon his right, a slighting of his providence, and a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere.

First, It is a contempt of God, and a reproaching of his providence. So says Solomon : “ He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his “ Maker ;” i. e. doth all that in him lies to deface the image of God that is impressed in him, and to ground that objection which is but too frequently and falsely asserted, that “ God “ takes not sufficient care of his creatures.”

But further : The uncharitable man is an usurper upon God’s right. “ The earth is the “ Lord’s,

“ Lord’s, and the fullness thereof, and he hath given it to the children of men,” not absolutely, but only in trust.

In respect of other men, we are indeed true proprietors of what we have; but in respect of God we are but stewards, who will exact an account of us how we have demeaned ourselves therein.

Let us not therefore greedily retain to ourselves alone these gifts of the Lord, which were designed as bread for the hungry, and as relief for the needy and oppressed, but deal out plentifully to every man as he hath need, “ as the Lord hath prospered us.” Again,

The uncharitable man is impious in slighting of God’s providence. He doth not consider that riches and poverty are from the Lord; “ that he casteth the mighty down from their seat, and exalteth the humble and meek;” that “ he filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich he sendeth empty away.”

God’s providence could easily have disposed of things otherwise, and have secured every man from want; but how then should the different offices of a good life be performed? God hath on purpose ordered this variety of conditions, that there might be an opportunity for the several exercises of virtue to appear, viz. that the poor might thereby manifest their de-

pendence on God, and their patience and submission to his will, and that the rich might shew their temperance, moderation, and charity.

Lastly, Unmercifulness to the poor is a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere.

St. James tells us, that “pure religion before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction,” and that “the wisdom which is from above is full of mercy and good works.”

St. John represents this uncharitable disposition as utterly inconsistent with the true love of God: “Whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

Nay, he tells us that it is impossible that such a man should love God: “If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a lyar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?”

This deserves to be seriously considered by those who make a great shew of devotion, but yet are defective in the great point and duty of love, lest (with the young man in the gospel)

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after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by Christ for "lack of this one thing."

Thus it appears, that to be "without natural affection" is a great sin. But,

Secondly, It is such a sin as alone, and without any other guilt, is sufficient to destroy us for ever.

The Scripture is full of severe threatenings against it: "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, and shall not be heard."

God himself will have no regard or pity for the man that is regardless of another's want, declaring in the most positive terms that the form and manner of our conduct, the mode and measure of it, will be again duly observed in his dealings towards us, yea, and in the dealings of all men one towards another.

"With whatever measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again;" yea, and that all shall have judgment without mercy, who themselves have shewed no mercy."

Our Saviour hath two parables to represent the danger of this sin to us, viz. that of the rich man, and the other of the covetous, who enlarged his barns to contain his store; and the moral of both are, "so is every man that layeth up store for himself, and is not rich

“towards God,” which we can only be, by the good works of mercy and charity in particular, God having expressly declared that these things he takes as done to himself, but looks upon every unjust contempt, and with-holding the good things of this life from our brethren, as a direct contempt and want of compassion, yea, even for his most sacred person; in the former instance declaring, that “inasmuch as “ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me;” and in the latter, “inasmuch as ye have not done it to “the least of these my brethren, ye have not “done it to me.” “Depart from me ye cursed “into everlasting fire; for I was hungry, and “ye gave me no meat, thirsty, and ye gave “me no drink; naked, and ye cloathed me “not; sick, and in prison, and ye ministered “not unto me. Depart from me ye cursed into “everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and “his angels.”

Thus to be “without natural affection,” to be hard-hearted and severe, without either “bowels of compassion,” or fellow feeling for the wants, for the sufferings and calamities of others, and to be unaffected spectators of other men’s necessities, or at the least putting them off with the words only of comfort, saying, “be ye warmed and filled,” when we have it

by

by us, without giving whereby for relief: this is a great and condemning sin, and is what God will not fail, but will severely punish; inasmuch as it is a sin both of inhumanity and impiety; of inhumanity to our fellow creatures, and impiety to our great Creator, and therefore justly gains every displeasure both human and divine.

There are many reasons besides what have been already urged, whereby to discourage so great and pernicious an evil.

The disgrace of it is no small argument against it; the evil we hereby gain to ourselves is equally dissuasive from it; every and all holy examples tend to discourage it, and therefore, in all ingenuity, we should put off so evil a temper, that we may be cloathed with the contrary affection, and so become an honour and ornament to our profession, and answer the true end of our creation in all sociability of our station, and gain to ourselves the love, the praise, and esteem of our fellow creatures, and what is still more truly valuable, the love, the praise, and esteem also of God our Creator.

There is nothing which we value ourselves more upon than in that dignity of nature wherein the Almighty hath placed us, and the capacity we have of acting suitably to it. This is what distinguishes us from the inferior part

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of the creation, and makes us glory in our exalted station.

There is scarce any man but desires to partake in this privilege that is common to our nature, and withal takes it as the greatest reproach to be thought beneath, or in any way to act contrary hereto.

To such men, therefore, where other more lively oracles and arguments of greater refinement cannot be admitted with effect, we must refer "these very first principles of nature;" they act contrary to their being, "without natural affection."

"Men disown it, as not of their nature; "they are ashamed of it, as a stranger to their "hearts. Do they not call it inhumanity?" It is against nature, which, in its uncorrupt state, is ever generous and free.

But further, not only against nature, but against ourselves also do we act hereby.

The chances and vicissitudes of life are so various, that there is no certain dependance upon the sure continuance of our state. "The man of wealth to-day may be a beggar to-morrow," and then how severely shall we bewail that evil lesson which we have taught our brethren against us, of want of tenderness and compassion for us; and what in such a state can we expect, but to be dealt with according

to

to our former treatment, and to have contempt cast upon us without mercy, who ourselves have shewed no mercy ?

These inferences naturally flow from the first deduction, viz. the inhumanity of the defect before us; but, if we consider it in the latter view, as impiety also against God, what and how light are all former considerations to what we must here expect ?

God hath a peculiar care, and is particularly watchful for good to the needy and necessitous; and therefore hath assured us that he will evil requite those who shall deal hardly with them without compassion, and will count it as despight done to himself, and will accordingly amply recompence tribulation to them.

“ Inasmuch as ye have not done it to the least
“ of these my brethren, ye have not done it to
“ me. Depart from me ye cursed into ever-
“ lasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his
“ Angels.”

I shall conclude with that excellent counsel of the wise son of Sirach.

“ My son, defraud not the poor, and make
“ not the needy eye to wait long; make not
“ an hungry soul sorrowful, neither provoke
“ a man in his distress: add not more trouble
“ to an heart that is vexed, and defer not to
“ give

“ give to him that is in need.” “ Reject
“ not the supplication of the afflicted, nor
“ turn away thy face from a poor man, that
“ the face of the Lord be not turned away from
“ thee. Turn not away thine eye from the
“ needy, and give him no occasion to curse
“ thee ; for, if he curse thee in the bitterness
“ of his soul, his prayer shall be heard of him
“ that made him.”

SERMON LXIV.

Of Mercifulness, &c. in Opposition to Uncharitableness.

EPHES. iv. 32. “Tender Hearted.”

TEnderness and compassion for the sufferings of others is a virtue so proper to our nature, that it is therefore called humanity, as if it were essential to us, and as if without it we did not deserve the name of men; yea, so far are we from being justified in any want of tenderness for man, who is our brother, that even the brute creation have a right and title to our pity and kind usage.

Compassion is an emotion, of which we ought never to be ashamed; graceful (in youth especially) is the tear of sympathy, and the heart that melts at the tale of woe.

Let not ease and indulgence contract our affections, and wrap us up in selfish enjoyment, but

but let us accustom ourselves to think of the distresses of human life, of the solitary cottage, the dying parent, and the weeping orphan.

“ Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor
 “ shut thy hand from thy poor brother, but
 “ thou shalt surely give unto him in the day of
 “ his need, and thine heart shall not be grieved
 “ when thou givest unto him, because that for
 “ this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee
 “ in all thy works.” Let us never sport with
 pain and distress, nor treat even the meanest
 insect with wanton cruelty.

“ Thou, who art happy by the mercy of thy
 “ Creator, how darest thou in wantonness put
 “ others of his creatures to torture? Beware
 “ that it return not upon thee.

“ Serve they not all the same universal mas-
 “ ter with thee? Hath he not appointed unto
 “ each its laws? Hath he not care of their pre-
 “ servation? and darest thou to infringe it?”

We have no right to despise every thing which is placed below us, or to look upon the ease and sufferings of the inferior part of the creation as matter of indifference, and as unworthy of our notice and concern.

They, who are of another mind, will not surely pretend that they are imitators of their heavenly Father’s goodness. He thinks them not below his care; “ his mercies are over all
 “ his

“ his works.” He, though the king of kings, condescends to be the feeder of the raven, and extends his providential care to the sparrow.

These are but the minuter instances of his love, by whose stupendous goodness all nature subsists, and to which every thing that is owes its being and preservation. This is but tracing the smaller streams from that fountain of living waters.

Yet ought not these to go unobserved, nor be observed in vain. “ Let us be followers of “ God, therefore, as dear children ;” let it appear that so winning and instructive an example is not without its proper force upon us ; let us remember and be convinced that man was made to feel for others as well as himself, and that every thing which has sense hath a right and title to compassion.

“ Be ye therefore tender-hearted, and love “ as brethren, having compassion one of ano-
“ ther.”

There is no need (I presume) to spend time in enquiring into the nature of the duty before us, nor need we consider the occasions and proper objects of it.

That solution of our Saviour to the question of the self-justifying lawyer is sufficiently explanatory herein, shewing us that no object whatever, however distant, or differing in interest

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terest and opinion from us, should be excluded from our care and compassion, when need and necessity present him before us; but that we should readily account an opportunity to do a kind office, a sufficient call, and the need of it a sufficient claim.

These things being fully evident to us by the natural light of our own minds, it may be of less service to speak to them in this view, than to see what arguments and considerations can be produced to excite us hereto, and what advantage may accrue to us from a due and thorough discharge of it.

And here the nature of God, of ourselves, and of the duty before us, plainly require it from us.

That perfection which the Almighty himself seems to exalt above all his other attributes, is the benignity of his disposition, the overflowings of his beneficence towards us.

Thus he proclaims his name in the most solemn and engaging manner: “ The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”

God being infinitely full of all possible perfection, whatever we discover in his nature that is communicable to ours, that we ought to follow and imitate, as our sovereign example, thereby shewing ourselves that we are the children

children of God by the participation of his nature: yea,

To this purpose it is that we are commanded to "be merciful, as our heavenly Father "also is merciful;" whereby we are to understand not merely his compassion and long-suffering, his pardoning and reprieving sinners, but also his unbounded love, his universal and overflowing goodness.

An imitation of which our blessed Lord particularly requires from us, whereby cannot possibly be meant any thing less than a tender feeling for the wants and infirmities of others, and a general benevolence, and every reasonable act of kindness, compassion, and charity, by which we may comfort, relieve, and oblige one another, in imitation of him by whose goodness all nature subsists: he created, and doth still preserve us, and when we by transgression fell redeemed us; and,

"Beloved, if God so loved us, ought not we also to love one another?" yea,

"If he hath loosed us, and forgave us all our debt, crowning us with tender mercy and loving-kindness, ought not we also to have compassion on our fellow servants, even as he hath had pity on us."

The whole of the argument is this; that every attribute and perfection of God requires a conformity and suitable perfection in us.

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By the goodness, tender mercy, and compassion of God, therefore, we are not only instructed in our duty, but obliged also and called upon to the diligent discharge of the same; for, though the brightness of such an example might itself allure us, might “ provoke us to love and “ to good works,” yet is not this the only consideration to be attended to. The obligation hence arising is likewise very great; for, since we have “ freely received, we should “ therefore freely give.”

Nothing can be more reasonable than that they should “ shew mercy who themselves “ have received, and also further hope for “ mercy.”

How odious then in the sight of God, of so gracious and benign a being, of a God that delights in mercy and is full of compassion, must that cruelty and want of bowels be, which is but too visible amongst us.

But further: Not only from the nature of God are we taught compassion, but even from our own also are we excited hereto, when pure and uncorrupt, and before we are tainted with the selfish maxims of this world, which (Medusa like) converts every its too attentive beholder into its own hardness, and according to the obdurate materials of its own compost; but, when pure and free, it is naturally given “ to love, and to good works;” yea, herein it is

is that we follow, and act agreeably to one of the prime and essential inclinations of human nature.

God hath implanted in our very frame and make a compassionate sense of the sufferings and misfortunes of other people, which disposes us to contribute all we can to their relief ; so that when we see any of our fellow creatures in circumstances of distress, we are naturally (I had almost said mechanically) inclined to be helpful to them. The Apostle very significantly expresses our pursuing this natural inclination, by “ putting on bowels of mercy.”

And, as all the actions of nature are sweet and pleasant, so there is none which gives a good man a greater or more solid and lasting satisfaction than this of feeling for our fellow creatures, which is an argument that the principle from whence this action proceeds is very deeply rooted in our nature, and that a due sense of those calamities we see others labour under, will not, cannot content itself with a bare fruitless and formal compassion, with saying unto them, “ be ye warmed and filled,” without giving them wherefore to such purposes, but will exert itself in real acts of beneficence towards them ; for, “ out of the abundant natural goodness of their heart will

“ flow an abundance to the relief of their necessities ;” yea,

The good man, unconstrained by law, and uncontrouled by human authority, will chearfully acknowledge, and generously satisfy every mournful and moving claim ; a claim supported by the sanction of Heaven, of whose bounties he is honoured to be the grateful distributor ; yea, where men follow nature in those tender motions of it, which incline them to compassion and kindness, they will not be easy except they lay hold of the proper occasions of exerting it, agreeable to that divine pattern of philanthropy exhibited to us in the conduct of our blessed Saviour, who, when he was at any time moved with compassion, he improved it to an opportunity of doing some great and seasonable good, even though he was at the expence of a miracle to do it, being himself tender hearted, was extensive in goodness, according to the greatness of his compassion.

Indeed this tenderness is so agreeable to our nature, and so apt to operate in us in our uncorrupt state, that from all languages * we have it represented to us under the most expressive terms ; and though there is some difference in

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* From the Greeks we very significantly render philanthropy ; from the Latins humanity ; and which, in the language of our own nation, and with a particular respect to the genius of it, we express by good nature.

the expressions, yet they all suppose compassion so deeply rooted in human nature, and so essential indeed to it, that men cannot divest themselves of it, or forbear the proper acts arising therefrom, without degenerating even below the common level of their beings. But,

Thirdly, The nature of the virtue itself is no less wounding hereto, together with the advantages which flow from it.

To be compassionate and tender hearted, and feeling for the necessities of others, is a God-like action, and most agreeable to the dictates of our own uncorrupt nature, and therefore must be truly pleasing to God, and also highly becoming us—these are arguments forcibly necessitating us to all becoming tender compassion.

If things are to be regarded according to their excellent greatness, and if one virtue differeth from another, as the virtues themselves differ in their degrees, so also should we regard that which is of greatest perfection. God (we have already seen) esteems it above all his moral attributes, yea, and it is agreeable to our nature.

What therefore is in these high respects thus recommended to us, let us esteem accordingly, and constantly shew forth the fruits of the same in all well doing, thereby manifesting ourselves to be sons of the Most High, and that we act agreeably to that high station in which

God hath placed us, for the general good of all men ; for what is more noble than to live by the example of the Deity ? or, what is more becoming us, than to live agreeably to our natures, in love and unity, in compassion and kindness ? But further,

Besides the honourableness of the practice of the virtue before us, its advantages are many, and great.

We hereby secure God for our friend, yea, and the love of all men, and consequently their good will, their kindness and compassion towards us at all times, together with the pleasing reflection of having done our duty, and acted agreeably to the nature of things before us.

The goodness of God being that attribute which he so much delights to honour, whereby he describes his nature to us, and wherein he abounds, 'tis pious to believe that such acts of goodness and compassion as we creatures are capable of performing are, in the very reason and nature of them, well pleasing to him, as they are a faint transcript of that divine copy which he hath set us of his own infinite goodness.

As God condescends to take upon him the character of a father, and the proper human passions arising from that relation, the more we endeavour to be like him (if we may argue from

from the effects of one of the strongest passions in men), the more he will like us, and be pleased to see his image renewed in us, especially in that part of it whereby in the Holy Scriptures he more particularly discovers a desire to distinguish himself.

1. And therefore it is a very powerful argument which our bles^d Saviour makes use of from God's paternal relation to us, to excite us to all proper and possible acts of beneficence and compassion to our fellow creatures. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

It is plain, from the context, and from the scope of our Saviour's discourse, that by being perfect, we are to understand the being of a good and merciful temper: yea, probably, he purposedly employed the word perfect to express such a temper, both in God and man, thereby to shew that the greatest perfection of human nature, and if there be one perfection greater than another in the divine, consists in this noble and excellent disposition; and what God thus highly values, man, in his corrupt nature, doth especially regard.

Yea, "thinkest thou this, O man, that thou who regardest another, that thou thyself shalt be disregarded? God forbid." God will not forget our labour of love, which we have shewed

“ shewed to the brethren for his great name’s sake,” but will count it as done to himself, and will reward us accordingly.

“ Inasmuch as ye have done to the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it to me.”
“ Enter ye into the joy of your God.”

And as to man, we shall have treasure heaped up in abundance for us, against the time of our need, in return for the compassion and relief we have shewn to them in their necessities; yea, “ pressed down and shaken together, yea, heaped up and running over, shall men give into our bosoms for these things towards them;” and in the mean time we shall have the composure and pleasing reflection of having done our duty, and acted consistent to our station, and consequently that we have secured the good will both of God and man towards us, and therefore that no evil can happen unto us.

“ Happy is the man then who hath sown in his breast the seeds of benevolence, the produce thereof shall be charity and love.

“ The griefs and anxieties of men excite his compassion; he endeavoureth to alleviate the weight of their misfortunes, and the pleasure of success rewardeth his labour.

“ As blossoms and flowers are strewed upon earth by the hand of spring; as the kindness of summer produceth the bounties of har-

“ vest—
benevolence.”

“ vest—so the smiles of pity shed blessings on
“ the children of misfortune ; yea,

“ The tears of the compassionate are sweeter
“ than dew drops falling from roses on the bo-
“ som of the spring.

“ Shut not thine ear therefore against the
“ cries of the poor, neither harden thine heart
“ against the calamities of the innocent.

“ When the fatherless call upon thee, when
“ the widow’s heart is sunk, and she imploreh
“ thy assistance with tears of sorrow, O pity
“ her affliction, and extend thy hand to those
“ who have none to help them.

“ When thou seest the naked wanderer of
“ the street shivering with cold, and destitute
“ of habitation, let bounty open thine heart,
“ let the wings of charity shelter him from
“ death, that thine own soul may live.

“ Whilst the poor man groaneth on the bed
“ of sickness, whilst the unfortunate languish
“ in the horrors of a dungeon, or the hoary
“ head of age lifts up a feeble eye to thee for
“ pity, O how canst thou riot in superfluous
“ enjoyments, regardless of their wants, and
“ unfeeling of their woes ?

“ Comfort the distressed, and so shall good
“ be rendered to thee from the Almighty.”

SERMON LXV.

Against Theft.

EXODUS xx. 15. "Thou shalt not steal."

HAVING in a preceding discourse exhorted the rich to "put on bowels of compassion," and liberally to extend their charity towards their suffering brethren, and that they would let pass no opportunity wherein to relieve them,

I shall now, by what considerations can be produced, endeavour to secure their property from the purloiner. "Thou shalt not steal."

What we are to understand by theft is too well known to need here any enlargement; I shall therefore only observe, by the way, that as this command is given to us in a general term, it binds us in a very general observance of it, and that we are hereby commanded (to use the words of the Apostle) "not to go beyond,

“ yond, or defraud our brother in any matter, “ great or small,” great or small, either in goods, or name.

This being premis'd, I shall proceed to lay before you such considerations as may, in all reason, make us become due observers of the command before us.

That which gives strength to all laws, is the power and authority wherewith they are backed to punish the violators of them; yea, this is the strength of the Christian laws, that “ there is one law-giver, who is able both to save and to destroy.”

In the delivery of the law, therefore, (of which the words before us are a part) God shewed himself to be of great power, and exceeding might: It was “ with much awful solemnity, with thunder and lightning, with smoke and exceeding trembling.” Now,

Precepts delivered in such a manner, we may be sure, God will expect us to obey with more than ordinary care; accordingly we find this charge given at the summary of the whole, “ that we be careful to obey and do them, for they are our life.”

Agreeably whereto we find the great Apostle Paul, when writing to the Thessalonians of the former commandments delivered unto them, repeats this also, against all fraud, theft, and deceit whatever.

“ That

“ That no man go beyond, or defraud his brother in any matter, for the Lord is the avenger of all such.”

There are many severe denunciations of God’s wrath to be executed at the great day against the wicked and unrighteous.

But, because unjust men (who have set their hearts upon this world, and who appear to center all their desires therein) are more affected with the consideration of temporary than future evils, I shall therefore observe to you some of the ordinary and common methods of God’s avenging justice against such sinners, even in this world ; and,

First, The providence of God seldom suffers theft, fraud, and injustice to succeed long.
“ Woe unto him (saith he by his prophet)
“ that increaseth that which is not his, and to
“ him that ladeth himself with thick clay ;
“ shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite
“ thee, and awake that shall torment thee ?
“ and thou shalt be for booties unto them.”

And indeed, had not God declared that his providence is concerned in bringing to light the hidden things of dishonesty, yet such persons and practices, even in the common and natural way, are apt to discover and confound themselves.

Besides, it is the interest of those against whom they are committed to discover them.

So that, even setting aside the consideration of God's just providence, it cannot be expected so long as the passions of men are concerned for their interests, as they always very nearly will, that theft and deceit shall prosper long: and, in this case, what the consequence must be is too evident, viz. the bringing a shameful life to a more ignominious and shameful death; and, we may add to this, in the mean while, the misery they must undergo through fear of detection, of shame and punishment consequent thereon, which is more than a counterbalance for all they can acquire by their knavery whatever.

It may be that a sinner may succeed herein, for a considerable time, yea, and perhaps for the course of his life; yet let him know that he hereby renders the circumstances of his death so much the more wretched and deplorable; and "what is the hope of the hypocrite, when God takes away his soul from him?"

An unjust man, who, for some trifling and inconsiderable, or even the greatest gain by these ways, hath endangered his soul, would then, no doubt, give all the world, were he master of it, for the testimony of innocence, and the favour of God in Heaven: who then would perish everlasting, for obtaining only the things which are perishable?

“Earthly goods (much less those that are ill-gotten) shall not profit in the day of wrath,” neither will they avert the just judgment of God against us, but will rather more severely increase it.

“Neither thieves, nor covetous, nor drunks, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God;” where then shall their portion be but “in the lake burning with fire and brimstone that is unquenchable, which is the second death, where the Lord will spoil their souls, as they have spoiled the goods of their neighbours.”

God makes this enquiry by his Prophet: “Who (says he) shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?” To which the answer is, “He that hath done no evil to his neighbour;” and in another place, “he that hath not spoiled by violence.”

But further: Besides the disadvantages of theft, as already mentioned, it is not of short or light effect even in this world; it ordinarily, if not constantly, entails a curse upon what is thus unjustly acquired; and had not the Scriptures, in express terms, declared that “wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished;” yet there is nothing more agreeable to the common observation of mankind in all ages. It is very significantly expressed against such acquisitions, that

that "they trouble a man's house," God many times depriving the children of the effects of the father by legal process, and sometimes, in his just judgment, even permitting luxury, riot, and intemperance, to disperse the wealth unjustly acquired ; thus one sin becoming the avenger of another : accordingly Job says concerning such men, that "they lay up iniquity " for their children."

There is one case (to mention no other at present) wherein men are apt to think themselves very excusable in the measures they take ; as, when they labour under any very pressing necessities ; when they want those necessary supports of life for themselves or their dependants, which their neighbours may well be supposed able to spare out of their abundance.

As to this case, whatever extremities people are under, it will by no means justify a criminal action ; we must not do evil upon any pretence.

A good intention will not justify an evil action, neither will a good action ever justify an evil intention ; both must be good, or neither will be accepted, much less where the intention is itself evil.

The wise disposer of all things who hath brought men under these circumstances, is able, when he pleases, to relieve them ; he can do it by a great many secret methods of his provi-

dence, tho' they are not able to discover them; and if they live in his true faith and fear, if they commit themselves unto him in "well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator," they may comfortably hope, from the goodness of his providence, that he will do it.

To encourage them in such an hope, there are innumerable texts in Scripture; I shall here only mention two of them: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord (saith holy David), and he shall sustain thee."

To the same effect is that comfortable advice of the prophet Isaias: "Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, who obeyeth the voice of his servant, and hath no light," i. e. hath no visible means or prospect of deliverance, "let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, and he will abundantly supply him."

To take any thing from another, only because we think we want it, or because we have power to take it, and will have it without any title thereto, is the highest pretence to dominion, and is the denial of our natural equality; it is pretending a right to disturb the happiness of others, and is to deny property among men, "contrary to truth."

Add to this, the provision which the laws of the land have made for all the truly necessitous.

I shall

I shall conclude with briefly laying before you the folly of theft in general, and the danger and ill consequences of it in particular, together with a few rules, as means whereby to avoid it.

First, This vice is committed through a mistaken value of things.

What can we put in competition with the peace of our own minds, with a good name, and the fame of a good report? "The price of it is above the price of the gold of Ophir, and the richest ointments are not to be compared unto it;" much more is it above the value of riches, ill-gotten by vanity.

Will riches, unjustly acquired, balance the loss of a good conscience, and inward peace and serenity?

Will any of the things of this world make amends for the loss of bliss eternal, and happiness unspeakable? and yet, so is every one that purloineth from his neighbour the things which are not his.

In a word, there is no thing worth stealing, for truth and honour, honesty and innocence, are in value above all things.

But further: The folly of theft is yet further apparent, in that it is devoid of its end, being to be restored; for, without restitution, there can be no repentance; yea, he who wrongs

F f 3 another,

another, and doth not to the utmost of his power make amends, cannot be supposed but still to approve the fact, and he who approves can never be said to repent.

I surely need not lay before you the shocking crimes, and the various malignant attendants wherewith it is too generally accompanied. Oppression and subornation are its almost never-failing attendants, and but too commonly the sin of deepest die, murder itself; and consequently (on the offender's part) the almost sure ending a wretched and shameful life, by a more ignominious and miserable death.

Yea, and what farther heightens the danger of a procedure herein, is the natural progress of this sin, to others of like nature.

One act of fraud and injustice naturally leads to another, and the temptation is the stronger, the more we comply with it.

It therefore especially concerns us (if we would not involve ourselves in sins of the deepest die, and number infinite) sincerely to practice the rules of entire honesty, a sincere and conscientious regard whereto being that alone which gives a secret blessing upon all our endeavours.

“The blessing of the Lord maketh rich” to all the best ends and purposes of life, and if it should not raise us to a distinction in this world, yet,

yet it hath this advantage above the greatest
“revenues without right,” viz. that “it
“bringeth no trouble with it,” and that “the
“end of it shall be blessed.”

Besides, though none of these greater ill-consequences should attend us, as being ourselves “innocent of great offences,” yet being guilty only even in matters of lesser moment, and most trifling, yet how vilely shall we be accounted of all men hereby; for, being once known to be addicted hereto, we shall always be deemed guilty of the same; yea, and of greater offences; and, consequently, shall be avoided of all men.

“Cast not an evil eye then on the goods of thy neighbour; let whatever is his property be sacred from thy touch.”

As to the rules, whereby to avoid theft, they are briefly these, (viz.) before we proceed to an evil action, let us reflect a little how we should approve the like from others; and then, “whatsoever we would not that others should do unto us, that we must in no way do to them,” would be an excellent means to preserve us herefrom. Again,

Another rule of great service herein is, to avoid idleness, the parent almost of every disorder: Seeing it is thro’ want that we steal, and that

that idleness naturally begets poverty ; this, therefore, should be carefully avoided.

Labour and industry do at least naturally provide necessaries, and he that hath these need not steal ; yea, industry is of higher effect ; it not only provides necessaries, but generally an abundance.

This is an inference from that command of the Apostle in the case before us : “ Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”

The last rule I shall lay before you to this purpose is, “ that we be content with such things as we have.”

Discontent and covetousness are the beginnings of all injustice ; let us therefore in time check this ripening temper, and be satisfied with that provision which God hath afforded us ; and, though it be not so delicate and sumptuous as others, yet, “ having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.”

Let us look upon all other things as superfluous and indifferent, and not murmur, tho' we should never attain them ; well-knowing, that a little will suffice for the short time of our abode here on earth.

What-

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Whatever is necessary to our subsistence, God's providence and blessing on our industry, together with the provision made by the laws of the land in behalf of the needy, will amply supply us with; and we ought not to repine for not having what we do not absolutely want.

SERMON

SERMON LXVI.

On Honesty, the Opposite of Theft and Knavery.

ROM. xiii. 13. “Walk honestly as in the Day.”

THE many beautiful similies, whereby the duties of Christianity are in Scripture represented to us, are, what throw exceeding light upon all its injunctions in this manner specified to us.

The brightness of the day, light, and clearness, are what manifest every work of man, just as darkness is the cover of all impurity and injustice.

“ He that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved; but every one that doth that which is lawful and right cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

So

So that to "walk honestly, as in the day," is so to act, that all our deeds may bear the strictest light and examination, and the most severe scrutiny of men; that no private sinister dealings be ever attributed to us, but that (according to the holy commandment) we "do " that which is altogether right, that we may " live and inherit the land, which the Lord " our God hath given us." "Walk honesty " as in the day."

In my further prosecution of which words I shall observe the following order:

First, I shall explain the import of the virtue before us.

Secondly, The great advantages we may reasonably expect therefrom.

Concluding with a particular caution relating hereto: and,

First, The due characters of justice or honesty are to give every man his own, and not to injure another.

The former relates more immediately to commerce, and the intercourse of men in their ordinary dealings, and comprehends all those duties which result from their wants, their necessities and claims from each other. The latter is still more extensive; and, by prohibiting all injustice, relates to almost every action of man. But,

As

As justice and honesty are terms which every one knows as well as any definition can explain them, I shall therefore but briefly touch upon some of the principal instances of it, and the several vices most opposite thereto; and here justice and honesty are concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourse with one another; yea, the observance of laws, and obedience to them, is a debt which every man owes to human society; that we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; that we exercise truth and fidelity, in opposition to falsehood and breach of trust; that we preserve equity and a good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction; that we defraud and oppress not; that we be as good as our word, and perform all our promises and contracts. But,

Secondly, I am to lay before you the great advantages which we may reasonably expect from a due observance of the command here given us.

It is commonly said that "honesty is the best policy," and I believe it is as commonly found to be true.

Those vices which pretend to be of advantage to us, when all accounts are cast up, and all

All circumstances duly considered, will be found to be quite otherwise; among these we may reckon that of fraud and dishonesty, which, if we look well into them, will be found either not to bring the advantages they pretend to, or that the inconveniencies which attend them are as great or greater than the advantages they produce, or else that the practice of the opposite virtues would be of much greater advantage to us. All this is really true in the case before us, and from which Solomon draws this just and happy conclusion, that "better is a little "which the righteous hath, than great reve- "nues without right;" because, though but a little, yet it will be more durable, and there is no trouble therewith: and, besides this, what honour and credit doth it derive to us, what interest, what peace and good order to the world, and to every member in particular therein!

The honest man, whatever his circumstances be, cannot be contemptible; yea, rather how is he caress'd, though even in poverty! and, "if in poverty, how much more in riches?" and is preferred before his unrighteous neighbour; yea, he only is worthy of esteem, that knows what is just and honest, and dares do it; that is master of his own passions, and scorns to be a slave to another's; such an one,

in the lowest poverty, is a far better man, and merits more respect than those gay Things who owe all their greatness and reputation to their rentals and revenues ; and if in this state it hath so great a renown, how much more truly resplendent is it in higher characters, and where there are so many more opportunities of deceit.

Here the honest man is he alone whom we wish to deal with, and the dishonest person is avoided of all who know him ; and long unknown he surely cannot be, whilst his frauds and deceits are so many.

So that whereas the unjust man, by his dishonesty, falls into contempt and poverty, the upright and honest man, by his uprightness, gains honour and wealth. But further,

Another advantage accruing herefrom is, that “against this there is no law,” and consequently “no harm can happen unto us, so “long as we are followers of this, which is good.”

And surely, if any thing can excite us to the practice of these things, it must be this, viz. that we are hereby secure from all danger whatever : yea, this is the most likely course we can take for our present ease and security, as having (in its own nature, and by the blessing of God) a direct tendency to free us from all evils, and to make us as securely happy as this our present state is capable of.

And,

And, is not this a very great and distinguishing privilege, which honest and upright men have above the unjust and wicked, whose ways are continually beset with dangers, and lead to interminable misery?

If such men suffer harm, it is but natural, their words and their works do incessantly call it to them; and it is the just recompence of their own deserts. But,

“Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” If good men suffer and are injured, it is unnatural; for every one must do them this justice, that they have claim and title to all due respect, and benevolent treatment.

Honesty and uprightness, whenever it is truly embraced and practised, have a natural and direct tendency to our security and peace; yea, the honest man, though not always the richest, is yet ever the safest. Though our adherence to honesty and uprightness should not advance us to a distinction in this life, yet it hath this advantage above the greatest revenues without right, that “it bringeth no trouble therewith, “and the end thereof will be blessed;” yea, and under the greatest afflictions (for we are not always sure of success, or of freedom from embarrassments in this life) he will be happy from the pleasing reflection of having done

G g 2 what

what is right. Conscious of this, he will be enabled to bear with fortitude those afflicting trials which virtue sometimes suffers, and wait with patience for that reward which, tho' late, he knows he must receive from the dispensations of a gracious providence.

What comfort and encouragement then must this be to us in the ways of honesty and uprightness, to be assured, that whilst we “follow after righteousness,” we at the same time pursue “the things which make for our peace;” and that tho’ we live in the midst of a wicked world, yet we have no reason to be afraid of their terrors, since our virtues are our security, our lives being such as do not only not provoke injuries, but directly tend to avert them; for “so is the will of God, that with well-doing we should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

What hath been already said being full of its own weight, I shall but briefly add one motive more, besides the caution already hinted at, whereby further to enforce it, and that is from the justice and equity of God.

“God is just,” and the more we discover of his nature that is communicable to ours, the more we ought to strive and imitate it.

“Let us therefore be followers of God as dear children, and walk honestly as in the “day.”

“day,” with all sincerity and uprightness; for hereby we not only honour God, but also greatly benefit ourselves.

This duty then hath an immutable reason, founded not only on the nature of things, but thus on the nature of God also.

In vain therefore shall we boast ourselves of our most holy faith, and that God is our Father, if we are destitute of the virtue before us; for “his children ye are, not whom in words “only ye confess, but whom in actions ye “obey.”

“Walk honestly, therefore, as in the day,” and “let your light so shine before men, that “they may see your good works, and so glo-“rify your Father, which is in Heaven.”

The caution I would propose is this, viz. that seeing that no virtues are better or more successfully taught, or adhere more closely to us, or remain longer with us, than those which are imbibed in our youthful days, we should be particularly heedful that children be early initiated into the duty before us.

We therefore that are parents and masters of families, and have to do in the world, ought to be just and equal in all our dealings; in the first place, for the sake of our own souls, and next, for the sake of those more immediately under us, and who are watchful to copy after

every example we shall lay before them, and which, in the particular of fraud and injustice, they will be as apt to imitate us as in any one thing whatever, because of the present worldly advantage it seems to bring with it.

Even therefore, in their most trivial things, in play and in sport, they should be kept in particular observance of honesty and uprightness, and to cheat at no time; because if they are unjust in a little, they will be much more tempted to be so when they can gain considerably by it.

To this observance both of our own conduct and the conduct of those more immediately in charge under us, we are more nearly concerned than we are generally apt to imagine.

As to ourselves, the vilely prostitute may, perhaps say, "is it not a little?"

But the commandments of God are not to be trifled with, and we must be chargeable for our own sins; but, where others take pattern by us, the offence is double; not will it avail those who are thus influenced by us who were the authors of their sins, if they are, thro' our temptation, equally guilty with us.

How will it make the ears of the hardiest of us to tingle, when in hell (with Dives) we shall "lift up our heads, being in torment," and shall hear these imitators of our vices thus severely rebuke us.

"Wo

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“ Wo is me that I was constrained to dwell
“ with Meseck, and to have my habitation
“ among the tents of Kedar, among them that
“ were enemies to peace:” “ Cursed be the
“ man that begat me, and the paps that gave
“ me suck.”

I cannot conclude better than with that heavenly advice from holy writ, viz. “ Keep in-
“ nocency, and take heed unto the thing that
“ is right, for that shall bring a man peace at
“ the last.”

SERMON

SERMON LXVII.

Against the Evil of Impatience.

JUDE, 16. “*Murmurers, complainers.*”

THE evil of repining at the providence of God, and the too general prevalency of it upon every trivial disappointment, is what will render a discourse on this subject altogether proper to be ranged amongst the general vices of mankind, and equally to be guarded against with other their deviations from virtue.

The ill grounds upon which it is founded, and the ingratitude of it to God, together with the ill consequences of it to ourselves, are the reasons and arguments I shall make use of to quell every “murmuring complainer.”

As to natural defects, since our persons are not of our own framing, and that it is God that made us, and not we ourselves, when they appear defective, it is a laudable fortitude neither

neither to be uneasy nor abashed with the consciousness of imperfections which we cannot help, and in which there is no guilt, and consequently no shame ; let us therefore not be peevish nor repining, but submit to this abasement as the punishment of sin, which was the great deformity that introduced all others into the world ; let us take care to secure to ourselves a happy resurrection, then all these deformities (the marks of sin) will be done away, and the most pure and perfect soul shall have the most bright and purified body, and will shine so for ever and ever.

Though in the Old Testament express notice be taken of the beauty of several persons, yet in the New no mention is made of one ; not that they wanted outward accomplishments, but the inward is what the Gospel hath chiefly recommended ; and, as to misfortunes of life, whoever repines at every trivial affliction that befalls him, is yet to learn the benefit of these things, and the ill grounds of his complaint.

In all the cases of our lives we fancy ourselves much more miserable than we are, for want of taking a true estimate of things ; we fly into transports without reason, and judge of the happiness or calamity of human life by false lights ; whereas a strict enquiry into the truth

of

of matters would help us in the one, and comparison would set us right in the other.

Afflictions afford room and exercise for admirable virtues ; as they are the trials of our faith, so do they give occasions for almost every virtue.

God, by want, teacheth men temperance ; by reproach and sufferings, patience ; by persecution, charity ; and pity and compassion to others, by grievous pains upon ourselves.

Virtue is made for difficulties, and grows stronger and brighter for such trials, and (agreeable to the Apostle) "will in the end receive "a great reward" for it.

The benefit of afflictions to them who make a right use of them is unspeakable ; they lead us on (however rugged the way may seem) to glory in the conclusion, and prepare us for those rewards which will amply recompense all the difficulties of obtaining them.

Examine as long as you please the goods of this world, and you will always find them much more desirable than they really are, till you have enjoyed them.

Examine likewise all the evils, and you will find them to be feared beyond what they ought to be, till you have made the experiment ; yea, a noble spirit must not vary with his fortune, but

but in our worst estate we should hope—in the best fear—and in all be circumspect.

But, not to rest the matter here, let us consider that we have received good from the hand of God, and therefore ought not to murmur at the evil we shall at any time be afflicted with, and, that the good which we have received from him we have no claim to; but the evils which we suffer we have strictly and properly deserved: and that these evils themselves, if we bear them in a becoming manner, will turn to our most important interests.

It was the return which Job made when tempted to “ curse God and die,”—“ Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ? ” He remembered the several prosperous years which had passed over him, and he knew by whose providence they had been directed; surely therefore there was a debt of gratitude owing on this account, which it became him, as far as he was able, to answer.

This he considered thoroughly, and therefore instead of any impatient murmuring at his present sufferings, he resigned himself entirely to God, and blessed the hand that afflicted him.

If the example of this great man (who is so highly celebrated in holy writ) be of any moment, we may apply it, in some measure, to all

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all who labour under affliction; for, though it be not frequent to be so highly favoured by providence as this great man had been in his more early years, yet who is there among us who hath enjoyed nothing, and who hath received no advantages from the influences of Heaven?

Even life itself, and the blessings of health and strength, are considerable; and the use of reason much more so; but over and above this, have not almost all men, in a greater or less degree, enjoyed the comforts and conveniences of life, and the advantages of fortune and friends? and are not all these owing to the bounty of God!

Shall our present sufferings then (if breaking in upon us) obliterate the remembrance of former favours, or abate our thankfulness for them? nay, if we are thankful for the former, why do we murmur at the latter, since God may be equally gracious in both?

It is certain there lay no original obligation on God to create mankind at all; much less to assign him any particular degrees of happiness. His justice therefore must be entirely acquitted, if man's enjoyment and suffering should but balance each other, and no man, without his own fault, be miserable.

In

In consequence of this, whatever is bestowed on any one, beyond the measures of his sufferings, must be the effect of pure goodness, and must therefore rather be received with thankfulness, than claimed as due.

And who can say that he hath suffered equal to the enjoyments of this life, and the promised glories of hereafter? Let these then be set carefully together, and from thence learn patience.

The argument I am upon will receive greater strength, when it is considered that these very evils which we suffer we have foolishly brought upon ourselves, either as the natural consequences of our imprudence, or as the judicial punishments of our sins.

Sometimes a man involves himself in difficulties by his own want of thought, by his heedless and indiscreet conduct; in such a case he deserves what he suffers, for providence is not concerned to prevent the evils he will not avoid.

Every man should act with common prudence at least, or if he fails in this, should consider the afflictions consequent upon it, as so many instructions to behave more wisely for the future. But, without taking this into the account, there is another foot on which we may argue the demerit of mankind, viz. the general corruption of our nature.

“ All men fall short of the glory of God,” and if they do not in the greater instances of

fend grossly, yet their very best actions are defective.

In this view they cannot approve themselves entirely to an all-righteous Being, “ who is “ of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; ” “ why then should a living man complain, a “ man for the punishment of his sins ? ”

If God should set our sins in order before us, our sins of omission and commission, instead of “ charging God foolishly, ” we should rather magnify his mercy in his lenity towards us, than arraign his justice as too severe in punishing us.

As he “ doth not deal with us after our sins, “ nor reward us according to our iniquities, ” we should therefore rather “ humble ourselves “ under his mighty hand, ” and for the future endeavour to glorify that God in our afflictions whom we have not sufficiently honoured in our lives.

In a word: If we are not so happy as we desire, it is well that we are not so miserable as we deserve: we have received much more good than we have ever done, and done more evil than we have ever suffered. But if this be the case even of the very best of us, what judgment shall we pass on those whose offences have been more provoking ? ”

To murmur under such circumstances, is to double our crimes, and thereby to increase the miseries

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miseries complained of. Add to this, that the evils which we suffer, if we endure them as we ought, will, in the end, conduce to our most important interests.

I shall not here insist (though properly I might) on the good use which we may make of our afflictions in our temporal concerns, should we take occasion from hence of altering our mistaken measures, and rectifying the error of our conduct.

What I design to suggest hath a more immediate reference to the supreme Being, by whose direction or permission at least these afflictions are brought upon us ; to submit therefore to them, as we ought, and bear them without "murmur or complaint," cannot fail of rendering us acceptable to God, and of securing to us all subsequent happiness.

Our afflictions not springing out of the ground, but coming to us from a wise hand, we may piously presume will (if we are not wanting to ourselves) be directed to the best of ends.

God sees our spiritual wants, and accordingly applies necessary remedies, which the more severe they are, the more service they may be. That which God designs for a noble end will (by his guidance with our own concurrence) be so ordered as to attain that end, and

which therefore we shall be enabled not merely to bear, but even to triumph over.

Dull despair will render us weak, whereas if we rouse ourselves to the combat, we are sure to conquer; for they must be mighty evils indeed, which can vanquish the hope and assurance of a Christian's faith.

What comfort may we draw to ourselves to this purpose, from considering the afflictions of our blessed Redeemer, "who, for the joy that was set before him, endured grief, and despised shame, suffering wrongfully," and from the afflictions of the early Christians, and the bravery with which they endured them. They were neither terrified by the prospect of the evils threatened, nor overcome by the sense of them when suffering, but "in all things committed themselves to him that judgeth righteously, as unto a faithful Creator, and rejoiced evermore." But,

The great point, and that which ought to influence us beyond all other considerations, is still behind; I mean the security of a future inheritance, and those additions of reward to which a due resignation to the divine will entitles us.

A great and merciful God, who afflicts us for good, will not desert us at the last; and if he sees fit (to answer the ends of his providence)

dence) not to remove our afflictions, he will then reward us for enduring them; nay, if the degrees of future happiness and recompence shall be proportioned to the degrees of our improvement in virtue, then he who hath attained to that excellent state of submitting to the will of God entirely in all things, cannot fail of being distinguished with an ample reward. His reward in Heaven will be great, and the very remembrance of what he once suffered will be even sweet unto him in reflection; therefore,

Secondly, Under all these circumstances, seeing the many good things we have received from the Almighty, and how that we are indebted to God for all that we enjoy and hope for, and that our very afflictions, if rightly improved, are and will be benefits unto us, as working in us patience and repentance, what sense of gratitude can we be supposed to have, if, after all these things, we still murmur and complain?

Do we thus requite the Lord of Life, and render him no other thanks for all his mercies unto us, than upon the first appearance of restraint or check upon us (which may still be of benefit to us), to murmur or complain against him?

Is this the way to please him, or to secure his future favour towards us? nay, "them

“ that honour me I will honour (saith the Lord)
“ and they that despise me shall be lightly
“ esteemed.”

Therefore, thirdly, in so doing, we greatly injure ourselves.

To murmur and repine is to contradict the laws of providence and the interest of mankind, a punishment no less than a fault to those that have it. To murmur and complain at the dispensations of providence can do us no good, but may do us a great deal of harm.

“ Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature ?” If things then are not to be altered for the pleasure of man, to grieve, to murmur and complain about those things, is only adding wormwood to our gall, and to increase the bitterness of our heart, and so double the misery which we already complain of ; for, “ after all, the Lord is King, be we never so impatient, or unmindful of him.” All our impatience, our murmurs and complaints, will profit us nothing under the Almighty, but will rather provoke him further to chastise us, or to give us up as incorrigible, and undeserving of any further regard : the sin is highly provoking in the sight of God.

In the days of the Israelites we may frequently read at large the judgments of God upon

upon it. It is the Apostle's advice, "neither
" (says he) murmur ye, as some of them also
" murmured, and were destroyed of the de-
" stroyer."

" Now these things happened unto them for
" examples, and are written for our learning
" upon whom the ends of the earth are come,
" that we should not be partakers with them,"
either in sin, or in the judgments consequent
thereon.

Perhaps it would be an happy cure of this disorder, if we looked around us and considered man in every sphere, where we shall find murmurs and discontents arise from almost every lot. It is expressly affirmed in Scripture, that temporary and transient evils often produce great and lasting advantages, as they are motives to repentance and amendment; that God chastens and corrects those in whom he most delights; that to such persons "all things work together for their good," and that virtue thus tried and exercised shall be recompensed with the highest honours in Heaven.

" Blessed is he that endureth temptation;
" for in time of recompence he shall receive a
" greater reward."

The consequence of which doctrines seems to be, that adversity, as it is an help to reform and improve the soul, an indication of God's favour,

favour, and an earnest of future happiness, should be rather received by a Christian, not with "murmuring and complaint," but with submission and thanksgiving.

We are assured that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God;" such persons therefore, whatever their condition or their circumstances be, are so far from any true grounds of complaint, that they can never want causes of gratitude towards him, who even out of trouble can produce peace, and whose very corrections are acts of kindness and mercy. To conclude:

" Perils, misfortunes, want, pain, and injury, are more or less the certain lot of every man that cometh into the world.

" God hath given no good without its admixture of evil; but he hath given the means of throwing off the evil from it.

" The best things in the hands of a fool may be turned to his destruction; and out of the worst the wise will find means of good.

" Say not that it were best not to have been born, or, if born, that it had been best to die early; neither dare thou to ask of thy Creator where had been the evil had I not existed? Good is in thy power; the want of good is evil; and if thy question be just, lo! it condemneth thee.

" Man

“ Man who fears to breathe a whisper against
 “ his earthly sovereign, trembles not to arraign
 “ the dispensations of his God : he forgetteth
 “ his majesty, and rejudgeth his judgments.

Yea, “ he who would hear the sentence of
 “ the magistrate with silence, yet dareth to
 “ plead with the Eternal, and murmurs at him
 “ if his request is not granted.

“ Why art thou unpunished, O man, in thy
 “ impiety, but that this is not thy day of re-
 “ tribution ?

“ Be not like unto those who fight with the
 “ thunder, nor dare thou to deny thy Creator
 “ thy prayers because he chastiseth thee.

“ Thy madness is on thine own head in
 “ this ; thy impiety hurteth no one but thyself.

“ It behoveth thee therefore, O child of ca-
 “ lamity, early to fortify thy mind with cou-
 “ rage and patience, that thou mayest support,
 “ with a becoming resolution, thy allotted por-
 “ tion of human evil.

“ When thy constancy faileth thee, call in
 “ thy reason ; when thy patience quitteth thee,
 “ call in thy hope.

“ To suffer is a necessity entailed upon hu-
 “ man nature ; wouldst thou that miracles
 “ should protect thee from it ? or shalt thou
 “ repine because it happeneth unto thee, when,
 “ lo ! it happeneth unto all ?

“ As

“ As the camel beareth labour and heat, and
“ hunger and thirst, thro’ deserts of sand, and
“ fainteth not, so the fortitude of a man shall
“ sustain him through all perils.

“ A noble spirit disdaineth the malice of
“ fortune ; his greatness of soul is not to be
“ cast down.

“ He hath not suffered his happiness to de-
“ pend on her smiles, and therefore with her
“ frowns he shall not be dismayed.

“ Under the pressure of misfortunes his
“ calmness alleviates their weight, and his con-
“ stancy shall surmount them.

“ But the dastardly spirit of a timorous man
“ betrayeth him to shame.

“ By shrinking under poverty he stoopeth
“ down to meanness ; and by tamely bearing
“ insults he inviteth injuries.

“ As a reed is shaken with the breath of the
“ air, so the shadow of evil maketh him tremble.

“ In the hour of danger he is embarrassed
“ and confounded ; in the day of misfortune
“ he sinketh, and despair overwhelmeth his
“ soul.”

SERMON LXVIII.

On the Virtue of Patience, in Opposition to murmuring and Complaint.

LUKE xxi. 19. “*In Patience possess ye your souls.*”

PATIENCE is one of those cardinal virtues which consists in bearing misery and affliction without complaint, and injuries and affronts without revenge.

We have already enforced the latter of these from a parallel text, and shewn what strong obligations we are all under to the exercise of it, together with the motives leading thereto,

I shall now therefore consider it only as it respects the enduring misery without complaint; and as it is here designed more particularly to oppose the preceding vice of murmuring under every cross accident that befals us, under which it would become us, both as men and

and Christians, “in patience to possess our souls.”

Afflictions afford room and exercise for admirable virtues; as they are trials of our faith, so do they give occasions for the manifesting several graces, of which patience is not the least. They lead us on (however rugged the way may seem) to glory in the conclusion, and prepare us for those rewards which will amply recompense all our labour.

This we affirm is absolutely true, where men suffer affliction for the cause of Christ, and in support of his religion; but this is a circumstance not so much in present view.

The Christian faith is established by the laws, and those powers are now happily engaged in its defence which were once employed for its destruction; yet still there is affliction enough in life to call forth the virtue before us; the evil of every day is sufficient, nor can we bear up against it but by fortitude and constancy; our very joys are broken and interrupted, and our distresses are oftentimes so sharp, that frequently we need all our resolution to support them; and yet bear we must what cannot be avoided.

The will of God must be submitted to by his creatures, both in the ordinary dispensations of providence, and the more eminent exercise of his power.

Patience

Patience then will come in as a necessary duty in common life; we need it almost every day on some occasion or other, and therefore should arm ourselves with such principles as may enable us to go through with innocence.

And here I might again not unaptly repeat all that hath been already said on the foregoing vice, in order to allay the murmurs of the discontented complainer, inasmuch as every argument against vice is equally an argument in favour of its opposite virtue.

If the consideration of our having received good from the hand of God is an argument why we should bear the several evils which he inflicts:—If the good we have received from him we have no claim to, but the evils which we suffer we have strictly and properly deserved; and if these evils themselves, when borne in a becoming manner, will conduce to our most important interests:—If these considerations are apt naturally to quell our complaints, then do they as naturally tend to the enduing us with patience, inasmuch as the ceasing from the one is naturally the being adorned with the other.

But, because I would not dwell on tedious repetitions, or what is still recent in the memories of the prudent, I shall here see what can be furthur produced in favour of the virtue before us, only premising that my design

in every argument against vice is, that it should be remembered in order to the increase of virtue.

Patience is a virtue common to us with God; it is the characteristic of Christ, and the leading precept of the Gospel; it is recommended by the example of all the Saints, and rendered necessary by the present state of man.

First, it is a virtue common to us with God. Long-suffering is his darling attribute; and, what is dear in his sight, ought not to be less precious in ours; yea, he so abounds in it, that, when we reflect, we are astonished at his goodness therein; but the patience which we so much admire in God shines forth yet more eminently in the person of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord; his whole life was made up of endurance; “he had not where to lay his head;” “he endured the contradictions of sinners “against himself, and bore the punishment of “all our sins:” “for the hope that was set “before him he endured the cross and despised “the shame, and is now for ever set down at “the right hand of God:” and, as to his followers, they “patiently endured the spoiling “of all things, were destitute, afflicted, tormented, not accepting deliverance, that they “might obtain a better resurrection.”

Thus prevalent are these precedents in patience; no less doth the nature of man, and the precepts of the Gospel, require it from us.

There

“ There is nothing in affliction but what is common to man.” “ Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards.”

What therefore is common to our nature should be borne with a becoming patience and resignation; till we put off our natures, we cannot expect to put off the conditions of it. How far it might have been to our benefit for God to have made us impassible to afflictions, is not for us to determine.

It hath pleased the Almighty, for reasons sufficiently evident for the trial of our faith, and the exercise of our other Christian graces, to make us subject to them.

There are few men but stand indebted to adversity for their virtues; even our pleasures would be insipid if some disappointment did not heighten their relish.

What therefore is required on our part, is to coincide therewith, and to make those good uses of them for which they are sent, and to which they as naturally lead, viz. of submission to the will of God, and the duly improving ourselves in a better conduct; and, from a consideration of the goodness of God, and his just right over us, and that it is thro' him all our afflictions either come or are permitted to assail us, we cannot doubt but of salutary effects from them, if we are not want-

ing to ourselves in the duly improving them to their right ends and uses.

If the hand of God be severe and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be assured that it is not without great cause that so much goodness is so highly offended and displeased with us; and will it become any man under these circumstances to rebel against the Most High? but this we do, whenever we repine at that which God lays upon us: yea, in doing this we are greatly unjust; for God hath a right, as we are his creatures, to do with us as he will, and therefore for us to resist that right of his is the highest injustice that can be.

Nay further, it is also the greatest folly, for it is only our good that God aims at in afflicting us: “If we endure chastening, God deal-“ eth with us as with sons; for what son is “there whom the father chasteneth not? but “if we be without chastisement (whereof all “are partakers), then are we bastards, and not “sons.” “Furthermore, we have had fathers “of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave “them reverence; shall we not much rather “be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, and “live? for they verily, for a few days, chas-“tened us after their own pleasure, but he for “our profit, that in the end we might be par-“takers of his holiness.”

Thus

Thus admirably doth the Apostle argue in the case before us : “ God then doth not afflict, “ nor willingly grieve the children of men.” They are our sins, which do not only give him just cause, but even necessitate him to punish us. God is our Father ; and as when a tender father sees his child to go astray, corrects him ; so for God to reclaim us from the error of our ways (though even with smart and affliction) is the greatest kindness he can do unto us, and is a sure sign of his affection towards us, and that he hath not as yet given us over to a reprobate mind, but graciously sends these afflictions to us, in order that we may “ know ourselves,” and the God that made us, and so become such as our natures require.

A true Christian knows how to make advantage of every thing ; the evils which he suffers are the good things which God sends him ; the good things which he wants are the evils which providence has secured from him ; every thing is a benefit to him, every thing in this world is a mercy. Such is the felicity of a true Christian, whilst uncertainty and trouble make the condition of all others unhappy. For, it is according to the true or false estimate of things that we are happy or miserable.

I shall only add under this present head concerning the duty before us, that we are as

Li 3. much.

much bound to it in one sort as in another, whether our sufferings be immediately from God, or whether man is the instrument of it, as ordered, or at least permitted by him to that purpose; for it is but an imperfect patience that pretends to submit to God, and yet can bear nothing from man, who acts mediately under him.

Holy Job, who is set forth to us as a pattern of true patience, made no difference in his afflictions; he took the loss of his cattle by the Chaldeans and Sebeans with the same meekness as he did that which was consumed by fire from Heaven.

Whoever looks upon things as coming only from second causes, and in his heart regards not the first, is apt to take offence at every cross accident that befals him; we should therefore look up to God in all our tribulations, from whom they more immediately come, man being only his instrument to correct us for our good.

Things are governed by an higher hand than ours, beyond our reach; neither do we know, upon the whole, what is best for us. God alone, who is both good and wise, knoweth these things, and accordingly sends them to us.

This only we know (and to know this is surely sufficient for the duty before us), that if we bear in a becoming manner the chastisements

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ments of his correction, "all things will work
" together for our good, inasmuch as we love
" God."

Thus reason suggests to us the endurance of
afflictions with patience, as we are men, and
reasonable creatures.

The evils of this life cannot hurt us, other-
wise than as we give them the mastery over
us, in giving way to their pressure. No-
thing therefore would fortify us more against
any manner of accidents, than the possessing
our souls with this maxim, that "we can ne-
ver be hurt but by ourselves." If our reason
be what it ought, and our actions according
to it, we are invulnerable. A wise and good
man is proof against all accidents of fate; he is
out of the reach of fortune, being hardened
against evil upon rational principles, and there-
fore stands firm in all extremities, and bears
the lot of his humanity with a divine temper;
yea, virtue is made for difficulties, and grows
stronger and brighter for such trials.

The religion of Christ is full of exhortations
to this duty: "Follow after patience." "In
" patience possess ye your souls." "Let pa-
" tience have her perfect work." "Add to
" your faith virtue, and to virtue patience, and
" to patience godliness." It has a connection
with every virtue; and begets, no less than is
begotten of them all.

Before

Before God was pleased more particularly to reveal to the Jews (his peculiar people) the joys of another world, he tempted Israel with the bliss of this, and instead of Heaven, shewed them Canaan.

But, when he “revealed unto us a new “Heaven and a new earth,” joys more substantial and lasting, the motives to obedience then greatly altered, and patience under afflictions was the condition proposed; “if any “man will come after me let him deny him-“self, let him take up his cross and follow “me.” And happy indeed will he be, who, though even with much tribulation, shall at last be where he also is, shall at last enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Temporal blessings, ease, and prosperity, are things beside the Gospel; they were not enjoyed by the greatest favourites of Heaven under the new dispensation; nay, under the old indeed, which so abounds with promises of temporal blessings to the good, we find exceptions from the general rule. Even holy Job, after his abundance, was greatly distressed; and David (the man after God’s own heart) had his distresses.

Under the new, we find that the blessed Jesus, who deserved the least of the ill things of this life, yet was overwhelmed with afflictions, God laying on him the burthen of the iniquity

iniquity of us all; he had not where to lay his head; and the primitive Christians were “ destitute, afflicted, tormented.”

Now here it will be no mean argument in favour of the virtue before us, to see how all these behaved in their respective cases.

Job blessed God under all his afflictions. “ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

And, did David utterly faint? no; his firm purpose was to “ trust still in God.”

The blessed Jesus (the divine pattern of patience) we find thoroughly endued with the most perfect resignation, not indeed with a stoical stupidity, but with what is by far superior, viz. the bearing and enduring afflictions with a becoming prudence. “ Lord let this cup pass from me, but, if not, unless I drink it, thy will be done.”

And now, after all these examples, (knowing that “ we have not yet resisted unto blood”) shall we faint when we are at any time chastened of the Lord? yea, rather, must not these examples, together with the former considerations of our own nature, and the more particular call we have hereto as Christians, mightily conduce to the mitigating of our trouble, and bringing us to “ possess our souls in patience,” under the sorest condition that can “ here befall us. But,

The

The great point, and that which ought to influence us beyond all other considerations, is still behind ; I mean the security of a future inheritance, and those additions of reward to which a resignation to the divine will must entitle us.

“ The light affliction of this world, which here endureth but for a moment, is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in us.”

Among all the graces then that adorn a Christian, there is none greater than that of patience, bringing “ glory to God,” and contributing towards “ peace on earth,” rendering us happy within ourselves.

Those who have been eminent for their faith in Christ, have been as eminent for their patience, without which their faith must have failed in the day of trial. “ Time would fail me to tell of the wonders which have been wrought by it ; by it they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the fiery darts of the wicked, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens, and became more than conquerors in all things :” by it is our repentance perfected, faith supported, hope preserved, and charity nourished ; it is all things to all men, and no less our honour and ornament than exceeding great reward.

Upon

Upon the whole, what is designed through this discourse is not that we should set ourselves (with the Stoics) above the sensibility of affliction, but only, when depressed, after our best and honest endeavours to relieve ourselves in all things, that we submit with a due resignation to the divine will, in what he shall at any time be pleased to lay upon us, out of a thorough conviction of the advantage of such a procedure, and in conformity to the great examples already produced, particularly of the blessed Jesus, whom to follow is no less our honour than our exceeding advantage. To conclude:

“ The vicissitudes of life are either good or
“ evil to man, according to his own choice,
“ and whether of them he will he may make
“ them.

“ As the hardest stone is fret by continual
“ dropping, so by a man, eminent in patience,
“ are the greatest difficulties subdued;—they
“ are overcome by enduring them.

“ Patience is the ground-work of all virtues; she commends us to God, and keeps us his; she is the guardian of our faith, and the preserver of peace, the cherisher of love, and the teacher of humility; she governs the flesh, strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, and subdues pride; she bridles the tongue, re-
“ frains

" frains the hand, tramples upon temptations,
 " endures persecutions, and consummates mar-
 " tyrdom ; she comforts the poor, and mode-
 " rates the rich ; she makes us humble in pros-
 " perity, cheerful in adversity, and unmoved
 " in all things ; she adorns the woman, and
 " approves the man, is beautiful in either sex,
 " and in every age.

" Now behold her appearance and her at-
 " tire ; her countenance is calm and serene, as
 " the face of Heaven unspotted by the shadow
 " of a cloud, and no wrinkle of grief or anger
 " is seen in her forehead ; her eyes are as the
 " eyes of doves for meekness, and on her eye-
 " brows sit cheerfulness and joy ; her mouth is
 " lovely in silence, and her complexion and
 " colour that of innocence and sincerity ; she
 " rides not in the whirlwind and stormy tem-
 " psts. of passion, but her throne is in the
 " humble and contrite heart, and her king-
 " dom is the kingdom of peace."

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.



ERRATA in VOL. IV.

Page 40 line 10, for *is* read *are*

56 — 15, after *towards* add *all men*

66 — 1, for *inimical* read *mimical*

67 — 12, for *it* read *and*

72 — 9, for *human motives* read *thoug^b human motives*

116 — 28, for *court* read *course*

146 — 2, for *the* read *this*

167 — 6, for *live* read *would live*

168 — 18, for *an* read *all*

188 in the text, for LUKE xvi. 37. read LUKE vi. 37

206 in the note, for *ja&tu* read *tactu*

284 line 16, for *thy* read *bis*

319 — 24, for *corrupt* read *uncorrupt*

332 — 19, for *ripening* read *repining*

